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SPIRITUALITY

THE HIDDEN MINISTRY OF PRAYER AND THE
READING OF SCRIPTURE

Dr. Stephen Ryan, O.P.

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Dr. James Chavarrapuzha

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THE ACTS OF THOMAS

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Inside This Edition

THE HIDDEN MINISTRY OF PRAYER AND THE
READING OF SCRIPTURE

Dr. Stephen Ryan, O.P. 88

THE FAITH OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH:
FINDINGS FROM THE PRE-ANAPHORAL PART OF
THE QURBĀNĀ

Dr. James Chavarapuzha 95

AMORAL THEOLOGICAL READING OF
THE ACTS OF THOMAS

Dr. Dominic Vechoor 115

BOOK REVIEW 125

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Editorial

Recognizing that “each word of Scripture is a gift” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 142), Pope Francis has been encouraging Christians to receive this gift daily, to read and meditate on the Gospel every day. Reading the Bible prayerfully, he teaches, is a “way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 152). In the “The Hidden Ministry of Prayer and the Reading of Scripture,” Fr. Stephen Ryan, O.P. draws on the works of two saints read widely in the East and in the West, St. Ephrem the Syrian and St. Isaac of Nineveh, to suggest ways that the Syriac tradition can help contemporary Christians to return to the practice of making sustained and prayerful contact with the Word of God a pillar and foundation of their lives. It is well known that the theology of the Syriac Fathers is deeply rooted in the Bible and filled with the language, symbols, and vocabulary of Sacred Scripture. Speaking on the basis of their own experience, as guides who have themselves walked the path, these Syriac Fathers teach us that prayerful reading of Scripture is a practice that purifies, enlightens, and rejuvenates. The Syriac Fathers encourage us to hold fast to

the Word of God and show us how to come to a deeper, more penetrating understanding of what we read.

From the reading of the Sacred Scriptures to the celebration of the Eucharist: that is the pattern set by the Risen Lord himself in the Emmaus event (Lk 24,13-35). Being the *centre and summit* towards which the activity of the Church is directed and the “fount from which all power flows” the holy *Qurbānā* is the most important faith proclamation. Dr. James Chavarpuzha in his article, “The Faith of the Syro-Malabar Church: Findings from the Pre-Anaphoral Part of the *Qurbānā*”, makes an enquiry into the sort of faith the Syro-Malabar *Qurbānā* proclaims. Basing himself on the dictum *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi* he analyses the creedal dimensions of the first part of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbānā* (Eucharistic celebration). Not only during the preaching of the Word but also during its entire celebration *Qurbānā* is catechesis in action. The arrangements of scriptural readings, hymns, prayers, symbols, rites etc. keep the faithful in direct contact with the sources of faith. Thus *Qurbānā* establishes a dialogue between God

and human beings and facilitates the growth of faith in each one of us.

From the proclamation and celebration of faith in the Eucharist to a life of faith in the spirit of the Paschal mystery: this is the ideal set by the early Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 2,42-47). *Acts of Thomas* is a Syriac apocryphal work of the third century AD. "A Moral Theological Reading of 'The *Acts of Thomas*'" by Dr. Dominic Vechoor is an in-depth study of one of the most valuable patristic sources that sheds light on the earliest mode of Christian moral living in

the Syriac tradition and in the Thomistic Churches. It gives a number of theological orientations, which are ever relevant to the faith and moral life of the Christian believers. "The patristic orientations, seen in the *Acts of Thomas*", the author hopes, "will assist us to address also the post-modern issues related to human life, human person, human sexuality, marriage and family, social ethics, etc." These reflections are quite timely as the universal Church is seriously considering the God-given role of Christian families in the world. Sincere thanks to all the contributors.

Dr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel
Section Editor

The Hidden Ministry of Prayer and the Reading of Scripture

Dr. Stephen Ryan, O.P.

*"Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart."*

Jeremiah 15:16

Introduction

When Peter made his triple profession of love on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Christ entrusted him with the ministry of the shepherding of souls ("Feed my lambs... shepherd my sheep...feed my lambs." John 21:15-17).¹ The ministry of the Word of God, the fostering of diligent study of the Bible and the teaching and preaching of Sacred Scripture, is one of the chief ways that this divine mandate to St. Peter is fulfilled. The Word of God is rightly said to be "the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of

the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life."² Bishops, priests and deacons especially are called to be guardians, heralds, and servants of the Word, and are instructed to "hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading (*assidua lectio sacra*) and careful study (*exquisito studio*),...since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy."³ The Church in recent decades has been inviting all believers to immerse themselves anew in the great ocean of love and beauty which is the Word of God.⁴ "The sacred synod also earnestly (*vehementer*) and especially urges all the Christian faithful (*christifideles omnes*), especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 3:8)."⁵ In this regard *Dei Verbum*

¹ Commenting on this passage, St. John Paul II has observed: "[A]s a shepherd leads his sheep to where they can find food and safety, so the shepherd of souls must offer them the food of God's word and of his holy will (cf. Jn 4:34), ensuring the unity of the flock and defending it from every hostile attack." John Paul II, "Peter is Charged with Feeding the Sheep," General Audience of December 9, 1992.

² *Dei Verbum*, No. 21.

³ *Dei Verbum*, No. 25.

⁴ This call to take up and read the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, has been a theme of the recent preaching of Pope Francis. He has urged Christians to carry the Gospels with them, and in his Angelus address on August 31, 2014, the Pope returned to this theme: "You must be continually renewed by drawing from the life source of the Gospel...by reading and meditating on the Gospel every day, so that the word of Jesus is always present in our lives."

⁵ *Dei Verbum*, No. 25.

makes special mention of the role of the study of the Eastern Fathers. “The bride of the incarnate Word, the Church taught by the Holy Spirit, is concerned to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures so that she may increasingly feed her sons with the divine words. Therefore, she also encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West (*studium sanctorum Patrum tum Orientis tum Occidentis*) and of sacred liturgies.”⁶ The Church Fathers entered deeply into the mysteries of the Word of God and as a result they are able to teach us both “how to penetrate the meaning of the revealed Word and [how to] communicate it to others.”⁷ The Syriac Fathers in particular offer rich and perennially important teaching on the prayerful reading and study of the Scriptures.⁸

Saint Ephrem and Saint Isaac of Nineveh

Judging by their wide dissemination in a variety of languages, the spiritual writings

of both Saint Ephrem the Syrian (4th century) and Saint Isaac of Nineveh (7th century) have proven to be immensely fruitful for Christian readers across the centuries.

Saint Ephrem’s influence is evident in much of later Syriac writing on prayer and the spiritual life, and Pope Benedict XV, in declaring Ephrem a Doctor of the Church in 1920, compared him with St. Jerome, calling them “two shining lights, one illuminating the West, the other the East.”⁹ The Book of Deuteronomy teaches that the words of God are food for the soul (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4), and St. Ephrem likens words of Scripture to life-giving water: “Through pure shepherds give me to drink from the pure stream of the Scriptures.”¹⁰

Sebastian Brock has observed that St. Isaac of Nineveh places “great emphasis on the immensity of divine love and on the need for humanity to respond to this with wonder and humility.”¹¹ St. Isaac has striking things to

⁶ *Dei Verbum*, No. 23.

⁷ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium: Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacraments and Leader of the Community* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1999) 18. Here the document cites an earlier one from the Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction on the Study of the Church Fathers in the Formation of Priests” (10 November 1989), 26-27: AAS 82 (1990), 618-619.

⁸ Excellent treatments of this theme can be found in two recent articles: Sebastian Brock, “Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible,” *Sobornost* 33 (2011) 6-21 (the three authors treated are Ephrem, died 373; Jacob of Serugh, died 521; and Isaac of Nineveh, died 7th century); and Mary Hansbury, “Love as an Exegetical Principle in Jacob of Serug,” *The Harp* 27 (2011) 1-16. I am indebted to both authors in what follows. See also Brock’s earlier treatment of this theme in his article “St. Ephrem the Syrian on Reading Scripture,” *The Downside Review* 125 (2007) 37-50.

⁹ Pope Benedict XV, “Encyclical of Pope Benedict XV on Saint Ephrem the Syrian (*Principi Apostolorum Petro*),” 5 October, 1920, 5. For his part, Jerome said of Ephrem that even in Greek translation he “could recognize the acuteness of his sublime genius.” See Jerome’s comments on “Ephrem the Deacon” in his work *On Illustrious Men* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999) 149.

¹⁰ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 35, 9-10, as quoted in Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom, A Study of Early Syriac Tradition* (Gorgias Press, 2004) 191.

¹¹ Sebastian Brock, “Ishaq of Nineveh (late 7th cent.) [Ch. of E.],” in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Gorgias Press, 2011) 214.

say about the reading and study of the Word of God as well. He speaks often of the joy we can expect to experience in the reading of Scripture and instructs us to “[b]egin every action that is for God’s sake joyfully.”¹² In the pages that follow are some of the richest texts from St. Ephrem, St. Isaac, and several other Syriac Fathers on the subject of the diligent reading and assiduous study of the Word of God.

The Reading of Scripture as the Gateway to Prayer

St. Isaac of Nineveh describes the relationship between the reading of Scripture and prayer in this way: “The reading of Scripture is manifestly the fountainhead which gives birth to prayer – and by these two things (sc. reading and prayer) we are transported in the direction of the love of God whose sweetness is poured out continually in our hearts like honey or a honeycomb, and our souls exult at the taste which the hidden ministry of prayer and the reading of Scripture pour into our hearts.”¹³ Reading of the sacred page, by which St. Isaac means prayerful vocalization of the words, can lead to converse with God and to a contemplation of the realities to which the words of Scripture point. The 7th century Syriac monk and bishop Sahdona, in his *Book of Perfection*,

describes the movement from reading to prayer in these words: “The effort involved in reading the Scriptures is thus greatly beneficial to us, all the more so since it causes us to become illumined in prayer.”¹⁴ St. Isaac gives this kind of reading great importance: “We should consider the labour of reading Scripture to be something extremely elevated, whose importance cannot be exaggerated. For it serves as the gate by which the intellect enters into the divine mysteries, and takes strength for attaining luminosity in prayer: it bathes with enjoyment as it wanders over the acts of God’s dispensation which have taken place for the benefit of humanity – acts which make us stand continually in wonder, and from which meditation too takes strength.”¹⁵ The two images employed for the relationship between the reading of Scripture and prayer, those of fountainhead and gate, are similar, and both suggest a movement from reading to prayer, a kind of ascent that begins with the pronunciation of the words on the page and penetrates through the words to the realities behind them. St. Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* 5:3-5 describe his experience of reading the Book of Genesis, which he likens to a bridge or a gate, and being transported by his reading into the very realities referred to by the words, to the very heart of Paradise. “I read the opening of this book and was

¹² Sebastian Brock, *The Wisdom of St. Isaac of Nineveh* (Gorgias Press, 2006) 8.

¹³ Brock, “Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible,” 19-20. The Syriac word correctly translated here as “the reading of Scripture” (*qeryana*), as Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev has noted, “refers primarily, though not exclusively, to the reading of Scripture.” See H. Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000) 174, and his treatment of this theme on pp. 174-184.

¹⁴ Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1987) 223.

¹⁵ Brock, “Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible,” 18.

filled with joy, for its verses and lines spread out their arms to welcome me; the first rushed out and kissed me, and led me on to its companion; and when I reached that verse wherein is written the story of Paradise, it lifted me up and transported me from the bosom of the book to the very bosom of Paradise. The eye and the mind traveled over the lines as over a bridge, and entered together the story of Paradise. The eye as it read transported the mind; in return the mind, too, gave the eye rest from its reading, for when the book had been read the eye had rest, but the mind was engaged. Both the bridge and the gate of Paradise did I find in this book. I crossed over and entered; my eye remained outside but my mind entered within. I began to wander among things indescribable.”¹⁶

The Reading of Scripture and Recollection of the Mind

The 5th century writer John the Solitary (Yohannan Ihidaya) commends an alternating and mutually illuminating rhythm of reading and prayer: “Pay attention to the reading of the words of Scripture, in order to learn from them how to be with God...Intersperse your way of life with various kinds of occupations: a time for reading, a time for prayer. In this way you will be illumined in prayer as a result of your reading.”¹⁷ He notes also that this

alternating rhythm can be useful when distractions arise and the mind wanders during prayer. “Toil at reading the Scriptures more than at anything else: for in prayer the mind frequently wanders, but in reading even a wandering mind is recollected.”¹⁸ Philoxenus of Mabbug (7th century) similarly notes the way that reading can be an aid to prayer in that it can help recollect the wandering mind. “One should read Scripture until the mind has become recollected from wandering thoughts; then, on perceiving in the mind that it has returned to its proper place, having come back to itself from the distraction which is outside it, immediately one should put down the Book and revert to prayer. In this way the reading of Scripture will be for the purpose of prayer.”¹⁹ The discipline of regular daily reading of the Scriptures can help to clear the mind of distracting worldly thoughts and worries. St. Isaac writes: “And when you stand up to pray and to say your rule of prayer, instead of thinking of what you have seen and heard in the world, you will find yourself pondering the divine Scriptures you have read, and this meditation will make you forget worldly things. In this manner your mind will come to purity...Instead of confusion from without, reading provides the soul with material for the different kinds of prayer.”²⁰

¹⁶ Sebastian Brock, *St Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990) 103-104.

¹⁷ Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1987) 87.

¹⁸ Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 92.

¹⁹ Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 130.

²⁰ Isaac the Syrian, “Homily Four,” in *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984) 36. Isaac puts this concisely in homily five (*ibid.*, 45): “Without assiduous reading, a man will know no refinement of thoughts.”

Growth in Charity and Purification of the Mind

In addition to leading to prayer, the reading of Scripture is frequently said to lead to a growth in charity and to purification of the mind. The words of Sahdona may serve as an illustration: "It is imperative then that we meditate continually on the divine Scriptures, for it is in them that God speaks. Meditation of this sort gives birth in the soul to love towards him, and to purity."²¹ The same writer goes on to describe the way that the reading of Scripture can lead to conversion of life for those who have neglected their spiritual life. "It is entirely right that the person who neglects his way of life should also be wrapped up in the labour of reading the Scriptures, for as a result of continually meditating upon them he will come to his senses and feel ashamed of himself. Then, little by little, his soul will begin to become illumined and be purified of the passions; he will habituate himself to good habits, providing training for a virtuous life."²²

This teaching on the reading of Scripture by the Syriac Fathers has numerous parallels in the Western tradition.²³ In a recent

message to the Carmelite Friars, Pope Francis summarized much of this tradition in his comments about Lectio Divina: "One of the most beautiful ways to enter into prayer passes through the Word of God. Lectio Divina introduces us to direct conversation with the Lord and opens the treasures of wisdom, intimate friendship with Him, Who loves us and renders us capable of seeing with the eyes of God, of speaking with His Word in our heart, of preserving the beauty of this experience and of sharing it with those who are hungry for eternity."²⁴

Illumination of the Mind

Jacob of Serug (6th century) speaks eloquently about the kind of illumination of the soul and the mind that can take place when the words of God are read with faith and with love. In his *Homilies on Elisha* he writes, "Scripture enlightens the soul's eyes through study. Read...and fill up with light from it through love. The sun shines from divine Scriptural readings upon the minds of those who encounter them with discernment. Like lamps of a great light within the darkness God put the Scriptures into the world so that it would be enlightened by them. The soul of

²¹ Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 221.

²² Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 223-224. St. Isaac has similar teaching: "Bodily toil and study of the divine Scriptures guard purity." See his "Homily Six," in *The Ascetical Homilies*, 58.

²³ This point is made by Sebastian Brock ("Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible," 20-21), who writes: "Very similar advice will be found in the Greek and Latin Fathers, and indeed what all of them are talking about is precisely the tradition of *lectio divina*, the meditative reading of Scripture."

²⁴ Pope Francis, "Message of Pope Francis to the Prior General of the Order of Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel," 22 August 2013.

the one who loves them is enlightened by scriptural readings and, possessing them, he walks as if in the light of day.”²⁵

Freedom and the Life of Virtue

“The whole of ascetic struggle and Christian Spirituality was for Isaac a way towards *freedom*.²⁶ One of the fruits of regular prayer and the reading of Scripture is the inner freedom which spiritual writers call a spirit of detachment. Addressing himself primarily to those who have chosen a life of prayer, penance, and voluntary poverty, St. Isaac notes the close connection between the study of Scripture, poverty, and the time needed for the cultivation of the spiritual life. “To water yourself with the study of the words of God helps you in achieving poverty, while achieving freedom from possessions affords you the time to attain to constant study of the words of God. But the help provided by both of them speedily erects the entire edifice of the virtues.”²⁷ Christians who have been given the grace to make their home in the Word of God and to live from it and by it, St. Isaac seems to say, are given an inner freedom, a spirit of detachment that fosters the kind of simplicity of life that not only monks but all followers of Christ should seek to achieve. This inner freedom in turn gives birth to the precious gift of time, time that

would otherwise be spent acquiring, maintaining, protecting, and using material possessions. The mutually reinforcing practices of study of Scripture and simplicity of life foster the life of virtue, or, as St. Isaac puts it, “speedily erects the entire edifice of the virtues.”²⁸

Prayer as the Key to Understanding

If the reading of Scripture can lead to prayer, it is also true that praying before the reading of Scripture can be an aid to understanding what it is we are reading. “Consider prayer to be the key to insights into Truth in the Scriptures,” writes St. Isaac.²⁹ Contemporary readers of Scripture find many things in the Bible difficult to understand. This was evidently a problem for early readers of St. Paul’s letters as well. The author of Second Peter was one of the first to call attention to the difficulties of Paul’s epistles: “There are some things in them hard to understand.” (2 Peter 3:16) As did many of the Church Fathers, St. Isaac held that prayer helps believers to penetrate through the words on the page to the realities signified by the words, and that prayer is “the key to insights into Truth in the Scriptures.” He instructs us to pray before reading and not to approach “the words of the mysteries contained in the Scriptures without prayer and without asking

²⁵ Jacob’s “On Elisha and on the King of Moab,” 1-14, as quoted in Mary Hansbury, “Love as an Exegetical Principle in Jacob of Serug,” *The Harp* 27 (2011) 2-3. Hansbury cites the translation of Jacob’s homily by S. A. Kaufman, *Jacob of Serug’s Homilies on Elisha* (Gorgias Press, 2010).

²⁶ Serafim Seppälä, “The Holy Spirit in Isaac of Nineveh and East Syrian Mysticism,” in *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church, The Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference, Maynooth, 2008*, ed. D.V. Twomey and J.E. Rutherford (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010) 137.

²⁷ Isaac the Syrian, “Homily One, On Renunciation and the Monastic Life,” in *The Ascetical Homilies*, 3.

²⁸ Isaac the Syrian, “Homily One,” *The Ascetical Homilies*, 3.

²⁹ Brock, *The Wisdom of St. Isaac of Nineveh*, 14.

for God's help.”³⁰ He even recommends this simple prayer, “Say, ‘Lord, grant that I may receive and awareness of the power that is within them.’” The words of God are powerful, and in approaching them we do well to arm ourselves with prayer and to ask for divine assistance. In this way we are likely to be given the grace to read and interpret Scripture “according to the same Spirit by whom it was written.”³¹

Conclusion

The Syriac Fathers refer often to “the labour of reading Scripture,” and by this they surely mean that it requires discipline, persistence, and perseverance to stay with this practice: “A small but always persistent discipline is a great force; for a soft drop falling persistently, hollows out hard rock.”³² But the labour they refer to, while demanding and at times painful, is experienced most often as a source of joy, of renewal, and of rejuvenation. St. Isaac bears eloquent witness to this: “Constant pondering on the holy Scriptures will always fill the soul with incomprehensible wonder and joy in God.”³³

Christians from the East and from the West have found in St. Isaac a reliable guide

in the life of the Spirit, for he himself has travelled the road he sets before us and hands on the fruit of his own contemplation. “A word derived from practice is a treasure of trust...One who speaks about virtue from the experience of his own labor brings a word to his hearers, as it were, from the riches of his commerce.”³⁴ Isaac’s word is one derived from his own practice. “While we are still here,” he exhorts us, “where changes can be made, let us take a look at ourselves, and while we still have control over the book of our life, and it is in our hands, let us be eager to add to it by means of a good life-style, and delete from it the defects of our former life-style.”³⁵

In beginning again the discipline of reading the Scriptures daily, we can anticipate an encounter with the living God, a purification of our minds, and a renewal of our spirits. Begin this work now, St. Isaac urges, and take it up anew each day: “It is God’s wish that each day we should be renewed and start up again with a virtuous change of will, and with a renewal of mind.”³⁶ As Paul instructed Timothy: “Attend to the reading of Scripture.”³⁷

³⁰ Allchin, *Daily Readings with St. Isaac of Syria*, 75. Isaac recommends this simple prayer: “Say, ‘Lord, grant that I may receive an awareness of the power that is within them.’”

³¹ *Dei Verbum*, No. 12: “eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et interpretanda sit.”

³² Brock, *The Wisdom of St. Isaac of Nineveh*, 8. St. Isaac writes (Brock, “Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible,” 19): “Persevere in reading Scripture...so that your intellect may be drawn towards the wonder of God at all times.”

³³ Brock, *The Wisdom of St. Isaac of Nineveh*, 8.

³⁴ St. Isaac, “First Discourse,” 34-35 translated from the Syriac by Mary Hansbury, *St. Isaac of Nineveh, On Ascetical Life* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989) 31-32.

³⁵ Brock, *The Wisdom of St. Isaac of Nineveh*, 22.

³⁶ Brock, *The Wisdom of St. Isaac of Nineveh*, 40.

³⁷ 1 Timothy 4:13

The Faith of the Syro-Malabar Church: Findings from the Pre-Anaphoral Part of the *Qūrbānā*

Dr. James Chavarapuzha

Introduction

The foundation and faith of the Church is epitomized in the mystery of Christ. The content of the mystery of Christ is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving deeds. These are made present in Christian Worship, especially in the *Qūrbānā*¹. The *Qūrbānā* is the source and mainstay of the life of the Church. Liturgy, especially the *Qūrbānā*, is the “fount from which all power flows” and is the centre of our faith. Similarly, being the *centre and summit* towards which the activity of the Church is directed, *Qūrbānā* is the most important faith proclamation. Each and every individual Church believes and experiences her faith through its *Qūrbānā*. To understand the faith of a particular Church, one needs to experience the *Qūrbānā* of that Church. If that is the case, what is the faith of Syro-Malabar

Church? Or what sort of faith does this Christian community proclaim in the *Qūrbānā*?

The proper understanding of the well known dictum *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi* - As we Worship, So we Believe, So we Live- guides the minds of the readers to comprehend this short study. In this article we analyse the Creedal Dimensions of the pre-anaphoral² part of the Syro-Malabar³ *Qūrbānā*, that constitute the core beliefs of the Church. It includes, for example, belief in Godhead, the Church, the Power of the Word of God, the remission of sins, the communion of saints, angels, and life after death etc. These are none other than the sum and substance of the catholic creed. These basic but important Creedal dimensions are repeatedly professed in the Syro-Malabar *Qūrbānā*. As these creedal elements are

¹ comes from the root word and it means ‘bringing in’, ‘offering’, ‘gift’, ‘oblation’, and so on. Cf. PAYNE SMITH, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, WSP, Eugene 1999, 517.

² The Pre-Anaphoral part is that part in the Syro-Malabar *Qūrbānā* from the beginning (*Pūqdānkōn*) till the *Kūdāpā* before the first *G'hanta*.

³ The term Syro-Malabar stands for the most ancient Catholic community (St Thomas Christians) in the whole of India. The Syro-Malabarians are not Syrians racially or culturally but only by rite. The particle *Syro* attached to their name signifies only that they use the East-Syrian or Chaldean language for liturgical purposes. Syro-Malabar Liturgy is of East-Syrian or Chaldean derivation. (For more details, see: P. PODIPARA, *The Syro-Malabarians, Their Life and Their Activities*, Prakasam Publications, Kottayam 1956, 241).

profoundly gathered in the pre-anaphoral part of the Syro-Malabar *Qûrbânâ*, we try and analyse the same through this article.⁴

1. Faith in God the Father

The Son of God became Son of Man so that man fallen astray can experience sonship again. The aim is to experience sonship throughout our life. There are many particular moments in our life where we can experience sonship viz sacraments, private and common prayers, reading of the Holy Scriptures etc. Among these particular moments, the celebration of the *Qûrbânâ* is the most profound one.

Table fellowship is the most unique experience of love. Only those who are in a relationship of mutual love can eat together. In *Qûrbânâ*, we learn about the table of love of the Father together with the Son. Here the Father gives His only Son to us. If we want to experience our sonship in relation to the Father we need to receive the Son as He (Jesus) is the only way to the Father. Similarly in table fellowship, or in other words the *Qûrbânâ*, we proclaim and experience that God is our Father and we are His sons. We can understand the Fatherhood of God from two perspectives.

1.1. God's Fatherhood in relation to *IsoMisiha*

In a very unique sense God is the Father of Jesus Christ. The son-ship of Christians is only an adopted son-ship because only in and through Jesus Christ we become the sons of God. *Abba* is the word used by Jesus to call God 'Father' in Mk 14:36. Other two New Testament uses are Gal 4:6, and Rom 8:15. In a good family a unique personal love exists between the father and his children. For Jesus Christ the word *Abba* meant the most simple and intimate relationship with God. "In Judaism the figurative use of 'Father' implies the thought of a close relationship between God and Israel or God and the righteous".⁵ Through His life as well as through His words Jesus brings a new attitude of son-ship. The Baptism of Jesus marked him as Son of God in a special sense, His experience of God as Father is reflected in his way of life, and it appears that he used a form of Aramaic word for 'Father' which contemporary Jews seldom or never applied to God.⁶ That means Jesus' relationship with the Father is a filial relationship. "Jesus' custom of addressing God in Aramaic as '*abba*' in prayer is distinctive and that the address is a caritative (= 'Dear Father', or 'Daddy') which implies intimate,

⁴ In this study we are analysing only the pre-anaphoral part of the Syro-Malabar *Qûrbânâ*. Our main source of reference would be the English *Taksa* of 1989.

⁵ A. WIKGREN, «*Abba*», in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible-An Illustrated Encyclopedia* 1, ed. G. A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, New York 1962, 3.

⁶ Cf. C. F. D. MOULE, «*God in the New Testament*», in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible-An Illustrated Encyclopedia* 2, ed. G. A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, New York 1962, 433.

family relationship. Thus Jesus claimed a special, familiar relationship to God as His Father beyond the general relationship postulated in contemporary Judaism".⁷

Jesus' relation with God as Father is different from the relation of the faithful with God as Father. Jesus Christ never uses the phrase 'our father' to mean that He is the Father of His and us in the same manner. Rather He uses 'my Father' and 'your Father'.⁸ It is sometimes said that He deliberately distinguished between His own unique closeness with the Father and their (disciples') secondary relationship. John 20.17 'my Father and your Father..., my God and your God,' may imply that, while there is indeed a distinction, yet the disciples are to receive from the unique Son a derived son-ship.

In the pre-anaphoral part of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbānā* also we find examples demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God the Father. The first priestly prayer is addressed to God the Father, and there it is said: "...through the mercy of your beloved Son".⁹ Jesus is the beloved Son of

God the Father. In the prayer for Sundays and Feast days that is recited after the kissing of *Sleeva*, the priest proclaims: "may we be found worthy to receive from heaven the manifestation of your beloved Son".¹⁰ This 'beloved Son of God' is also the 'only begotten Son of God'. At the end of the pre-anaphoral part, before the beginning of the anaphora the worshipping community as a whole proclaims its belief in the 'only begotten Son of God' through the Creed.¹¹ The prayer recited by the celebrant before going to the *Madbhā* to take the *Evangelion* for proclamation asserts Christ as the splendour of the glory of the Father and the image of the person of Him.¹²

In a prayer of Polycarp of Smyrna we see the examples for the above mentioned concept. This prayer of the dying martyr is very important for the history of early Christian prayer. Here Polycarp addresses Jesus as beloved and blessed Son of God the Father.¹³ Mar Aprem also touches this subject in his treatises. According to him; Christ is the Son of God¹⁴ and therefore, the fruit

⁷ R. E. BROWN, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, Doubleday, New York 1993, 172.

⁸ Cf. Jn. 20:17, 6:32, 14:2, 14:23, 2:16, 15:8.

⁹ *The Syro Malabar Qurbānā: The Order of Raza*, Syro Malabar Bishop's Conference, San Jose Process, Trivandrum 1989, 3. (Here after I use *The Order of Raza* to designate '*The Syro Malabar Qurbānā: The Order of Raza*').

¹⁰ *The Order of Raza*, 11.

¹¹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 32.

¹² Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 18.

¹³ Cf. J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, 1, Christian Classics, Notre Dame 1952, 78.

¹⁴ Cf. EPHREM, *Das Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnem de Fide*, ed. E. Beck (CSCO 154/155; Syr 73/74), Louvain 1955, 12.

of the Father¹⁵ and the First-born (*bukra*).¹⁶ In the East-Syrian Liturgy the holy bread is also called *bukra*. It symbolises that it is an offering of the first-born and is a symbol of Christ, the first-born of the heavenly Father (Col 1:15). The Son of God is not created like other creatures because He is the Word and God.¹⁷ Thus it is obvious that Jesus enjoys an incomparable relation with God the Father.

1.2. God's Fatherhood in relation to Humanity

In a collective sense, God is the Father of all humanity. In the Old Testament, Israel is considered as the son of God. God's Fatherhood is related to the chosen people in the Old Testament. When used, it was redefined to mean son-ship by adoption, as in Yahweh's gracious election of Israel (Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:1-4). God is frequently alluded to as the father of His people in the Old Testament. This 'father-son' relationship gets a new meaning in the New Testament where the Fatherhood of God is extended to all human beings. Man as such stands under the Fatherhood of God (Mat 5:45). But

properly speaking God is the Father only to the faithful (Jn 1:12-13). The faithful achieve their son-ship through Jesus Christ and they experience their son-ship in the celebration of *Qurbānā*.

It is because of this belief that the celebrating community throughout the *Qurbānā* lovingly addresses God as 'Father'. In the *Qurbānā* of the Syro-Malabar Church, the entire worshipping community has the feeling that God is 'our Father'. They experience the fatherly love of God. The community acclaims together 'Our Father in Heaven' (the Lord's Prayer).¹⁸ The Syro-Malabar Church uses the term 'Our Father' five times in the Lord's Prayer and the word 'Father' once. The Church recites the Lord's Prayer a total of three times during the *Qurbānā*, in the beginning¹⁹ and the end²⁰ with *Qānōnā*, and before the Holy Communion²¹ without *Qānōnā*. *Qurbānā* is actually the moment which enables us to call God 'Father' which is the basic intention of the incarnation. Many prayers in the pre-anaphoral part either begin or end with the mention of 'Father'.²²

¹⁵ Cf. EPHREM, *Das Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ecclesia*, ed. E. Beck (CSCO 198/199; Syr 84/85), Louvain 1960, 16.

¹⁶ Cf. EPHREM, *Das Heiligen Ephraem des Syres Hymnen de Nativitate*, ed. E. Beck (CSCO 186/187; Syr 82/83), Louvain 1959, 11.

¹⁷ Cf. E. BECK, *Die Theologie des Heiligen Ephraem in seinen Hymnenuber den Glauben*, (Studia Anselmiana 21), Roma 1949, 50-51.

¹⁸ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 2.

¹⁹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 2.

²⁰ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 59.

²¹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 52.

²² Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 2,3,4,8,9,10 etc.

The celebrant personally addresses God 'my Father' when he officially approaches the *Madbhā* praying; "I give you thanks, my Father, Lord of heaven and earth, Father".²³ Here the celebrant as the official representative of the worshipping community feels that God is his Father and the Father of all worshipping community. He enjoys the freedom of a son. It is because of this freedom he calls God 'my Father'. It is in the name of the community he addresses God 'my father'. This freedom of the son is what we have to attain in the celebration of the *Qūrbānā*.

2. Faith in God the Son

The faith of the Syro-Malabar Church in the second person of Trinity is very clearly acknowledged in the Creed. Here the worshipping community, with one heart and one mind assert that Jesus Christ is 'the Only-Begotten Son of God'²⁴ and He is 'born of the Father before all ages'.²⁵ During the celebration of *Qūrbānā*, Christ appears as

second person of the Godhead, united with Father and the Holy Spirit. There are many theological hints that focus on Lord Jesus in this *Qūrbānā* celebration. Some of them are briefly explained below.

2.1. *IsoMisiha* is the Lord of All

One of the most significant concepts about Jesus Christ is that He is the Lord of all. Jesus is the Lord of all because He existed before all ages²⁶ and He defeated death and Satan through His glorious resurrection.²⁷ The pre-existence of Jesus Christ is strongly believed and confessed by the Church. Jesus is confessed in the *Qūrbānā* as the Lord of all in a very ancient hymn called *Laku Mara*.²⁸ It is a resurrection hymn which acclaims Jesus' divinity and humanity. This prayer is repeated thrice with the Psalms. Through this repetition, the Church professes the divinity of Jesus Christ and His victory over death. Moreover we proclaim our faith in our own resurrection and life after death. The priestly prayer which

²³ *The Order of Raza*, 33.

²⁴ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 32.

²⁵ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 32.

²⁶ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 32

²⁷ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 32

²⁸ *The Order of Raza*, 11; "Lord of All, we praise you; Jesus Christ, we glorify you; for you are the quickener of our bodies and the gracious savior of our souls". is the *Resurrection Hymn* and also known as *Song of Adam*. According to Pierre Yousif, it is one of the most archaic elements of the East Syrian Liturgy. For Varghese Pathikulangara, according to the tradition of the Syriac Churches, this song was sung by those who were in Sheol when our Lord descended to it after His death, in order to celebrate His victory over suffering, death and Satan. So it is known as "song of Adam/song of the sons of Adam". According to Mannooramparambil, this hymn is said to be composed by the Catholicos Simeon Bar Sabba (323-341) and introduced in the *Qūrbānā* even before the hymn *Trisagion*. Cf. YOUSIF, «The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Assyro-Chaldean Church», 201; PATHIKULANGARA, *Qūrbānā: The Eucharistic Celebration of the Chaldeo-Indian Church*, 166-167; MANNOORAMPARAMBIL, *Syro-Malabar Sabhayude Qūrbānā Oru Padanam*, 174.

follows the hymn repeats the same idea of *Laku Mara*.²⁹ The term 'Lord of All' is one of the usual terms that is used for the 'Father' in the liturgies.³⁰ But in *Laku Mara*, the Church professes that Jesus is the Lord of All. It is a classic example of the tendency of the early Church to proclaim the divinity of Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

2.2. The Incarnation of *IsoMisiha*

By the incarnation of the second person of Trinity- human beings, sons of fallen Adam, are now able to attain salvation. In the Nicene Creed we see the following words: "For the sake of us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit, and became man, and was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary".³¹ This is what the angels proclaimed, what the Church fathers taught, what the daily prayer of the Church affirms. Jesus Christ is the same Firstborn Son who was born of the Father and of the Virgin. According to Babai the Great, He is the first born of Mary because He opened her womb; He is the first born from the dead because He is the first one to be risen from the dead in His humanity; He is the firstborn of all creation, because through him everything is

renewed.³² In his hymns Mar Aprem draws a nice description on the mystery of the Incarnation. 'Put on a human body' is the most favourite theological expression of Aprem on the incarnation.³³ Christ took flesh from Mary and settled in her like light enters into an eye and through her the light enlightened the world and its inhabitants.

In the *Turgamma* before the Gospel proclamation, the deacons together with the choir proclaim, "The Son of God took the likeness of a man among men".³⁴ The same *Turgamma* gives a beautiful and deep explanation of the Incarnation. "The only-begotten Son of God came to the world and was born of a virgin supernaturally in a nature surpassing that of angels. He healed the sick; raised the dead; cast out devils and repudiated death. For though He died, He rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven".³⁵ The Son of God was born of a virgin and at his incarnation He was really a human being and He lived among people. In the Rite of Prostration it is prayed; "By your grace, O Lord, be present in our midst, as you were with the Apostles".³⁶ There is a reason why God has sent His only Son to us. It is the 'Eternal Mercy' of the Father which sent Christ to us.³⁷ This eternal mercy can be

²⁹ *The Order of Raza*, 12.

³⁰ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 9,10, 21, 28,34.

³¹ *The Order of Raza*, 32.

³² Cf. G.CHEIDIATH., *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great*, Dissertatio ad Doctoratum in Theologia et Scientiis Patristicis, I P A, Roma 1982,175.

³³ Cf. EPHREM, *Das Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnem de Fide*, 3-4.

³⁴ *The Order of Raza*, 19.

³⁵ *The Order of Raza*, 19-20.

³⁶ *The Order of Raza*, 28.

³⁷ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 18.

considered as the eternal love of God. As Mar Aprem says it is God's love which is revealed in the Incarnation.³⁸ This love of mystery that is to say the mystery of incarnation is professed by the Church through the prayers of the pre-anaphoral part.

2.3. The Resurrection of *Iso Misiha*

Jesus' resurrection is the pinnacle of His Incarnation. It is the centre of Christian faith and the culmination of the economy of salvation. Resurrection is celebrated by the Eastern Churches as the crowning of Christ-event.³⁹ Sunday *Qurbānā* is the weekly remembrance of Lord's Resurrection. In the Nicene Creed the Church proclaims; "...and on the third day (He) rose again as it is written".⁴⁰ Christ has risen incorruptibly, and perfectly. He appeared to the disciples and confirmed them in faith that he had risen from the dead. He showed them wonders to prove it.⁴¹ The passion and death of Jesus Christ always go together with the Resurrection which is the basis of the faith of each believer. The Lord's Day or Sunday was the earliest feast in the Christian calendar. Sunday became the commemoration of the resurrection of

Jesus and it was observed with the celebration of the *Qurbānā*.⁴²

To emphasize the spirit of resurrection, the Syro-Malabar Church uses *Mar ThomaSleeva* in their *Madbhā* which has no image of crucified Jesus. The St Thomas Cross or *Mar ThomaSleeva* is the dynamic Indian expression of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It proclaims the theological, Christological, Pneumatological and Ecclesiological dimensions and specifications of Christian faith.⁴³ This Cross is an empty cross without the dying figure of Jesus on it. "The cross without the dying image of Jesus, like the empty tomb, was the symbol of resurrection in the primitive Church".⁴⁴ In imitation of the empty tomb, this plain *Sleeva* (*Mar ThomaSleeva*) symbolises the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Syro-Malabar Church has a rich tradition of standing during the entire *Qurbānā* celebration. This is the part of the Tradition of almost all the Oriental Churches. "The classical eastern liturgical position of the priests and of the people is standing facing the East".⁴⁵ It was the common, usual prayer posture of the Jews.⁴⁶ Christianity has always upheld the venerable

³⁸ Cf. EPHREM, *Das heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnem de Fide* (Hymns on Faith), 6.

³⁹ V.PATHIKULANGARA, *Liturgy - Experience*, Denha Services, Manganam 1995, 122.

⁴⁰ *The Order of Raza*, 32.

⁴¹ Cf. Mt 28; Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20.

⁴² Cf. A.KAKKANATT, *Christological Catechesis of the Liturgy; A Study on the Great Feasts of our Lord in the Malankara Church*, Mar ThomaYogam, Rome 1996, 35.

⁴³ Cf. PATHIKULANGARA, *Qurbānā: The Eucharistic Celebration of Chaldeo-Indian Church*, 57.

⁴⁴ V.PATHIKULANGARA, *Nammude Qurbānā*, Denha Services, Kottayam 1992, 59.

⁴⁵ C.VELAMPARAMPIL, *The Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word in the Syro-Malabar Qurbānā: A Biblico-Theological Analysis*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1997, 227.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gen 19:27, Deut 10:10, 29:10, 1Sam 1:26, 1Kings 3:15.

tradition of standing in prayer. We can also see similar examples in the Gospels (Mt 6:5, Mk 11:25, Lk 18:11, 13). The Christians received this ancient posture with a new meaning. For them, standing posture manifested the Easter existence of the Redeemer. The Early Church insisted upon standing on Sunday and in the Easter season because of the grace and joy of the resurrection of those days. The First Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325) in its canon 20 teaches on this liturgical posture thus: one should offer one's prayers to the Lord standing.⁴⁷ The posture of standing during the celebration of the *Qūrbānā* symbolises joy, because resurrection is an event of joy. In *Qūrbānā*, the -worshipping community joyfully proclaims its faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ by standing during the entire celebration. This spirit of joy and dignity is seen in the exhortation of the *M'samsana* at the beginning of the *Kānōjyā* for Sundays and Feast days; "Let us all stand up with joy and exaltation and let us pray, saying; Our Lord, have mercy on us, O Lord".⁴⁸

Many prayers in the pre-anaphoral part highlight the theme of resurrection. In the *Turgamma* before the *Evangelion* the deacons together with the choir recite; "For though He died, He rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven".⁴⁹ *Qūrbānā* is the

memory of Jesus' resurrection. The Archdeacon, when he presents mysteries on the altar proclaims that *Qūrbānā* is the memory of Jesus' passion, death, burial and resurrection.⁵⁰ Thus, through the celebration of *Qūrbānā*, the Church proclaims her faith in the resurrection of the Lord and her hope in the resurrection of the faithful.

2.4. The Second coming of *IsoMisiha*

Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven will come again gloriously. This is the firm faith of the Church always. The Book of Apocalypse ends with the prayer, 'Amen. Come Lord Jesus' (Rev 22:20). It is with this faith and expectation that the Church celebrates the *Qūrbānā*. The celebrant in the priestly prayer just before reciting the *Laku Mara* (during *Laku Mara*, the *Madhbā* is unveiled) prays; "may we be found worthy to receive from heaven the manifestation of your beloved Son...".⁵¹ In the liturgy at appointed times the veil is drawn aside. It is during the singing of the resurrection hymn that it is opened for the first time. When we connect these three things - *Laku Mara*, unveiling of the *Madhbā*, and the above said priestly prayer - we can recognise the fact that the Church proclaims undeniably her faith in the second coming of Jesus Christ. The Church praises the Lord Jesus Christ who is

⁴⁷ Cf. VELAMPARAMPIL, *The Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word in the Syro-Malabar Qūrbānā: A Biblico-Theological Analysis*, 229.

⁴⁸ *The Order of Raza*, 21.

⁴⁹ *The Order of Raza*, 20.

⁵⁰ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 31.

⁵¹ *The Order of Raza*, 11.

divine and human at the same time, who has risen from the dead and who will come again to judge the living and the dead. The priest who is presenting the *Qūrlānā* gifts at the altar recites; “these glorious life-giving and divine mysteries are set and arranged on the holy altar of Christ, until the glorious second coming from heaven”.⁵² *Qūrlānā* is celebrated in the Church until the second coming of Jesus from heaven. In the Nicene Creed we read the following; “He will come again to judge the dead and the living”.⁵³ The worshipping community altogether confesses its faith in the second coming of the Lord. The first *Kuṣāpā* of the celebrant at the *Madbhā* clearly depicts the faith of the Church in the second coming of Jesus: “Lord Jesus Christ, through your ineffable grace, sanctify this sacrifice and impart through it virtue and power that it may blot out our many sins so that when you shall manifest yourself at the end of time in that humanity of our which you assumed, we may find grace and mercy in your sight and be made worthy to sing your praises with the hosts of angels”.⁵⁴ The eschatological understanding of the Church which highlights the second coming of Jesus is brought to light here. *Qūrlānā* is always related to the faith aspects. In and through these prayers the Church teaches her children about the second coming of Jesus.

3. Faith in God the Holy Spirit

In the Church, the redemptive work is continued through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit inspires the Church to pray (Rom 8:26) and the Spirit inspires us to address God as ‘Abba, Father’ (Rom 8:15-16). The *Qūrlānā* gathering is an assembly united with the Lord in Spirit to celebrate the mystery of redemption according to the pattern of the Last Supper institution. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, who is the active agent of the sanctification in the *Qūrlānā*, draws the believers, by faith, to the movement of the self-offering of Jesus Christ.

The Syro-Malabar Church throughout her *Qūrlānā* proclaims its faith in the Holy Spirit. Most of the prayers end with the Trinitarian formula where the third person of the Trinity is mentioned.⁵⁵ The special functions of the Holy Spirit are repeated in the pre-anaphoral part. The Gospels were written by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the ‘*Onīṣād*’ *Evangalion* the deacon proclaims this truth; “Four wonderful men wrote the great Book of the Gospel of our Redeemer Christ the King, by the power of the (Holy) Spirit”.⁵⁶ In the *Turgamma* of the *Evangalion* the deacons read; “He sent the Holy Spirit on His apostles and made them wise”.⁵⁷ It is the

⁵² *The Order of Raza*, 30.

⁵³ *The Order of Raza*, 32.

⁵⁴ *The Order of Raza*, 34.

⁵⁵ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 2,3,9,10,15 etc.

⁵⁶ *The Order of Raza*, 18.

⁵⁷ *The Order of Raza*, 20.

Holy Spirit who strengthened the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In the prayer of the imposition of hands, the celebrant asserts the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit: "And through the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is consubstantial with your glorious divinity, are conferred, by the imposition of hands, the orders of the true priesthood".⁵⁸ It is in the same prayer the Church says that the order of the true priesthood is conferred through the grace of the Holy Spirit by the imposition of hands. The prayers of the Rite of Prostration attribute the whole mystery of sanctifying the people's offering to the work of the Holy Spirit. We read: "The priest, when he comes to the holy altar, devoutly stretches his hands to heaven and invokes the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit descends from above and sanctifies the Body and Blood of Christ".⁵⁹ The celebrant repeats this prayer four times and firmly affirms this basic faith of the Church. According to the second *Karoz̄ūṭa*, charity is the bond of perfection by the efficiency of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰

In the *Karoz̄ūṭa* after the Creed, the deacon proclaims that the *Qūrlānā* is graciously accepted and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ According to Theodore of Mopsuestia the change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is effected

by the calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the oblation.⁶² Cyril of Jerusalem also regards the calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the oblation by the epiclesis as that which effects the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.⁶³ The role of the Holy Spirit in the Church is more evident in the prayers of the Syro-Malabar *Qūrlānā*. The Holy Spirit lives among us and makes the manifestation of Himself more certain to us through the liturgical celebrations.

4. Faith in the Church

The Church is the assembly of the faithful. It is the chosen people of God who were redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The concept of the term 'Church' (*ecclesia*) is to be understood as the final perfection of what the Hebrew Bible from the beginning had called 'the Assembly of Yahweh'. The first mention of the 'assembly of Yahweh' is seen in Ex 19 where the Israelites gathered at the foot of Sinai to receive from the Lord the Law, which announced to them 'You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex 19:6). This gathering formed the wandering Israelites as 'the people of God'. The day of gathering is termed 'the Day of the Assembly' (Deut 9:10; 10:4, 18:16) and this assembly is

⁵⁸ *The Order of Raza*, 25.

⁵⁹ *The Order of Raza*, 27.

⁶⁰ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 23.

⁶¹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 33.

⁶² Cf. THEODORUS MOPSUESTENUS, *Homiliae Catecheticae*, ed. J.P. Migne (PG 66), Migne, Paris 1864,5.

⁶³ Cf. CYRILLUS HIEROSOLYMITANUS, *Mystagogiae 1-5*, ed. J.P. Migne (PG 33), Migne, Paris 1857,1104.

the religious assembly of the people of God gathered together to take part in public worship. In the fullness of time the mystery of salvation accomplished in Christ constituted the election of the new people of God: a reassembling of the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52) into the Church (Mt 16:18).⁶⁴ Thus an *ecclesia* – ‘an assembled community’ – was formed to hear the Word and to break the Bread. The term *Ecclesia* when applied today to the Syro-Malabar Church designates not only the gathering of the Christians, but also the periodical reunions of the St Thomas Christians around the Word and the *Qūrbānā*. This gathering in the name of the Lord is to be understood as the Church. Every worshipping community of St Thomas Christians assembled for the celebration of the *Qūrbānā* is gathered together as the Church at the command of the Lord.

For Ignatius of Antioch “the Church is the place of sacrifice”.⁶⁵ For Didymus the Blind, the Church is the ‘Mother of All’.⁶⁶ The prayers in the *Qūrbānā* are filled with this ecclesial spirit. The recital of the prayers with the response ‘Amen’ by the community and the alternating singing of different chants

demonstrates the communitarian character of the Syro-Malabar *Qūrbānā*. The idea that the prayers recited by the celebrant are in the name of the community and for the community is clearly expressed in the pre-anaphoral part.⁶⁷

The sanctification of the Church comes from the Lord. During the ‘*Onitād*’ *Qanke* the faithful ask the Saviour to sanctify the Church.⁶⁸ The idea that Church’s qualification as the Spouse of the Son is very rich in the East-Syrian liturgy. In the two priestly prayers, before the *Laku Mara*, the Church is portrayed as the spouse crowned with every help and blessing.⁶⁹ In the first *Kānōzūta* the deacon prays for the peace and stability of all Churches.⁷⁰ In the same *Kānōzūta*, the Pope is considered as the head of the entire Church of Christ. The name ‘Holy Catholic Church’ is used in the prayer of imposition which is recited on Sundays and Feast days.⁷¹ And the Church was redeemed by the great passion of Christ. In the prayer of imposition, which is recited on ferial days and during Great Lent, the Church is called “Catholic and Apostolic” and this Church is “spread from one end of the earth to the other”.⁷² The worshipping community prays for the well being of the

⁶⁴ Cf. VELAMPARAMPIL, *The Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word in the Syro-Malabar Qūrbānā: A Biblico-Theological Analysis*, 250.

⁶⁵ Cf. IGNATIUS ANTIOCHENUS, *Epistola Ad Ephesios*, ed. J.P. Migne (PG 5), Migne, Paris 1857, 646.

⁶⁶ Cf. J.QUASTEN, *Patrology*, 3 Christian Classics, Notre Dame 1959, 97.

⁶⁷ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 3,9,11 etc.

⁶⁸ *The Order of Raza*, 10.

⁶⁹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 11.

⁷⁰ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 21.

⁷¹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 25.

⁷² *The Order of Raza*, 26.

Church. The celebrant in the name of the community prays; "Preserve it (Church) from all harms, visible and invisible".⁷³ The community all together deepens its faith in the Church. Before the beginning of Anaphora it confesses the faith in the "One, Holy, Apostolic and Catholic Church" in the Nicene Creed.⁷⁴ Church is the assembly of the faithful. It is in this assembly that the revelation of God happens now. It is in the Church, the *Qūrlānā* is celebrated. It is by the Church, the *Qūrlānā* is offered.

5. Faith in the Power of the Word of God

The will of God is conveyed to the people through the word of God both in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Word or the Holy Book is recognized as the record of God's self-revelation and it provides the history of the gradual unfolding of God's eternal plan for the salvation of mankind. The revelation of the Word of God in the Old Testament reached its perfection and realization in the New Testament through Jesus Christ because in the New Testament the WORD Himself revealed the word of God.

The Word of God attains its fullness in revelation in the liturgy. In the *Qūrlānā* there is a part called the Liturgy of the Word. The section of the *Qūrlānā* from *Trisagion* to the Dismissal rites is known as the Liturgy of the

Word in the Syro-Malabar *Qūrlānā*.⁷⁵ There are four readings in the *Qūrlānā* on Sunday's and Feast days- two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. On ferial days there are only two readings.

The Liturgy of the Word in all liturgical traditions is considered more of a celebration of the Word than an occasion to read and understand the meaning of the biblical texts. It is a public proclamation of the Bible as the source of faith. According to V. Pathikulangara it is because of this celebrative emphasizing of the Liturgy of the Word that the Eastern traditions, all of them, like to chant the readings.⁷⁶ Before the reading of *Qeryana* and the *Engariathe Qaryya* and the *M'samsana* receive the blessings from the celebrant. It is to shower His mercy upon the reader and the listener.⁷⁷ In the Syro-Malabar Church, only the celebrant proclaims the Gospel. The Gospel is taken from the *Madbhā* to the *Bema* with a solemn procession and the celebrant himself chants the Gospel of the day.⁷⁸ The *M'samsana* standing in front of the celebrant incenses the Gospel throughout the time it is chanted.

The power of the Word of God is very clearly pictured in the pre-anaphoral part of the *Qūrlānā*. According to the priestly prayer before the epistle, the Word of God is the 'sweet voice of your life-giving and divine

⁷³ *The Order of Raza*, 26.

⁷⁴ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 32.

⁷⁵ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 12-26.

⁷⁶ Cf. PATHIKULANGARA, *Qūrbānā: The Eucharistic Celebration of Chaldeo-Indian Church*, 170.

⁷⁷ *The Order of Raza*, 13,17.

⁷⁸ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 20.

commandments'.⁷⁹ The question why the Bible is called the 'Word of God' is also answered in the *Qurlānā*. The Gospel is the Word of God because it is written with the power of the (Holy) Spirit.⁸⁰ The Word of God has the healing power. Before the Gospel proclamation, the deacons chant the *Turgamma* where we read; "come and listen to the words that heal the body and give life to the soul".⁸¹ The life giving power of the word of God is depicted here. The Gospel is a spiritual treasure which is wholly filled with life and happiness. "Devils flee and evil spirits depart in fear when they hear this living and life-giving word".⁸² It is the door through which man enters the heavenly abode. The dead come to life through this word. This word is light, life and truth.⁸³ Thus the Syro-Malabar Church very decisively proclaims the power of the Word of God through its *Qurlānā*.

6. Faith in the Holy Angels

In the Hebrew Bible there is a rich vocabulary for Angels.⁸⁴ Angels are considered as the messengers of God. The most common of these functional terms is *mal'ak*, (messenger).⁸⁵ The English word angel

is derived from this Greek word or from the Syriac/Aramaic word *malaka*. According to C. A. Newsom it is from the translation of *mal'ak* in the LXX (*Gkaggelos*) that the English word 'angel' is derived.⁸⁶ In the Syro-Malabar *Qurlānā* we can see that the Syriac word *malaka* is used for the angel.⁸⁷ In Deut 33:2, Yahweh is said to be accompanied by ten thousand holy ones as He advances from the southland (Cf. Ps 68:17-18). These are undoubtedly the angelic armies that are referred to in the common divine title Yahweh of Hosts. There are many texts which describe the actions of a single angelic figure (Gen 16:10-12, 31:11-13, 2Kg 1:3, 15, Num 22:31-35). There are angels designated by specific names like Michael, Gabriel, Raphael etc.⁸⁸ The New Testament also gives many references to the angels.⁸⁹

In the beginning of the *Qurlānā*, just after *Puqdankōn*, the celebrant together with the worshipping community repeats the prayer known as 'Angel's Hymn'- "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace and firm hope to men in all times forever and ever".⁹⁰ It is known as 'Angel's Hymn' because it was the praise of the angels when Jesus was born (Lk

⁷⁹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 15.

⁸⁰ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 18.

⁸¹ *The Order of Raza*, 19.

⁸² *The Order of Raza*, 19.

⁸³ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 19.

⁸⁴ Cf. C.A.NEWSOM, «Angels», in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1, ed. D. N. FREEDMAN, Doubleday, London 1992, 248.

⁸⁵ Cf. NEWSOM, «Angels», 248.

⁸⁶ Cf. NEWSOM, «Angels», 248.

⁸⁷ *The Order of Raza*, 2,3,etc.

⁸⁸ Cf. Dan 10:13, 12:1, 8:16, Tob 3:17, 12:15

⁸⁹ Cf. Lk 1:11-20, 2:8-14, Mt 2:13, Lk 22:43, 28:2-3, Acts 28:2-3, Mt 28:3, Rev 15:6, 19:14, etc.

⁹⁰ *The Order of Raza*, 1.

2:10-14). In the liturgy the references to angels are mainly related to heavenly worship. In the Lord's Prayer which the Syro-Malabar Church uses at the beginning of the *Qurlānā* we see the following phrase: "Angels and men are cry out to you"⁹¹, which is repeated twice. In the 'Onīād'Rāzā the celebrating community sings together twice: "The Body of Christ and His precious Blood are on the holy altar. Let us all approach Him with reverence and love, and let us sing His praises with the angels: Holy, holy, holy, holy Lord God".⁹² These two prayers of praise, the Lord's Prayer and 'Onīād'Rāzā, are set in the context of heavenly liturgy. Here the people worship God together with the angels. The Church is actually enjoying a fore-taste of the heavenly liturgy in the celebration of *Qurlānā*. The angels surround the throne of God in heaven and chant His praises.⁹³ In the priestly prayer before the Rite of Kissing the *Sleeva* we see the mentioning of angels with names and numerals. It is said tens of thousands of seraphim and archangels are singing 'holy'.⁹⁴ In the *Turgamma* before the Gospel proclamation it is said that the only begotten Son of God was born of a virgin in a nature surpassing that of angels.⁹⁵ The faith in the angels is traditional. Now there are many who

question the existence of the angels. The prayers of the Syro-Malabar *Qurlānā* are a fitting response to them.

7. Faith in the Communion of Saints

The concept of holiness is rich in the Old Testament writings. "As a covenant people, Israel is a holy nation, being consecrated as the peculiar possession of God, who is uniquely holy and the source of Holiness".⁹⁶ In New Testament, the faithful are called the saints (Mt. 27:52). Christians are 'saints' by virtue of being 'in Christ Jesus' (Phil 1:1). The holiness of Christians is in respect of God's calling because they have a vocation as consecrated people. The saints will be associated with Christ in the final judgment of the world including the angels (1Cor 6:2-3). "Saints naturally becomes a common term for the members of the Church, and the Pauline letters are addressed to the various local communities under this title (Rom 1:7, 1Cor 1:2, 2Cor 1:1, Eph 1:1, Phil 1:1, Col 1:2)."⁹⁷

According to P. Rouillard, in the beginning the martyrs, bishops, and other saintly persons were held in veneration in the local church where they lived.⁹⁸ In the first

⁹¹ *The Order of Raza*, 2.

⁹² *The Order of Raza*, 29.

⁹³ Cf. Lk.2:13, Rev.4:9, Is.6:2-3, En.39:12.

⁹⁴ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 8.

⁹⁵ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 19-20.

⁹⁶ G.W.H.LAMPE, «Saint», in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible-An Illustrated Encyclopedia* 5, ed. G. A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, New York 1962, 164.

⁹⁷ LAMPE, «Saint», 165.

⁹⁸ Cf. P.ROUILLARD, «The Cult of Saints in the East and the West», in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies-Liturgical Time and Space*, ed. A. J. Chupungo, A Pueblo Book, Minnesota 2000, 299.

phase of the development, the *Qūrīnā* was celebrated by the community gathered around the tombs of the martyrs.⁹⁹ Later the names of the saints were remembered in the celebration according to the importance they held for the local and Universal Churches.

In the Syro-Malabar *Qūrbānā* the commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints and the faithful departed are made with solemn hymns. In the *Surraya* before the Epistle there is a provision to commemorate saints as per the various liturgical seasons.¹⁰⁰ While the chalice and paten are incensed by the deacon, the celebrant mentions the name of Old Testament father Aaron.¹⁰¹ Similarly, just before the anaphora all saints are remembered in the *Qūrīnā*. In the *Kārōzītā* after the Creed the deacon prays; "And remembers all prophets and apostles, martyrs and confessors of this place and of every place. May God who will crown them at the resurrection of the dead grant us, with them, firm hope, together with a participation and life and inheritance in the kingdom of heaven".¹⁰² The deacon proclaims the members of this sacramental community according to their rank and their relation to the celebrating community, and asks the

members to remember them during the celebration.¹⁰³ At the end of the Rite of Prostration there is an Anthem of Mysteries. In the second part of this anthem, the Church remembers the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Mar ThomaSleeha*, Apostles, holy fathers, martyrs, just and confessors and the departed ones.¹⁰⁴ The community remembers here all those who are intimately related to the Mystery of salvation as the sacred Mysteries are being prepared and arranged on the *Madhbā*.

This second part begins with, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Upon the sacred altar let there be commemoration of Virgin Mary, Mother of God".¹⁰⁵ The Church first remembers the Blessed Virgin Mary, as the historical life of Jesus was fully dependent on the good will and consent of Mary. Secondly they remember the Apostles on whom the Church is built up.¹⁰⁶ Thirdly, there is the memory of *Mar ThomaSleeha*. The personality of *Mar ThomaSleeha* is unique to the Syro-Malabar Church, as he is her father in faith. It is because of this filial relation, the Church remembers him so solemnly. Then there comes the remembrance of the holy fathers, martyrs, just men and confessors who have borne

⁹⁹ Cf. ROUILLARD, «The Cult of Saints in the East and the West», 299.

¹⁰⁰ *The Order of Raza*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 23-24.

¹⁰² *The Order of Raza*, 33.

¹⁰³ Cf. PATHIKULANGARA, *Qūrbānā: The Eucharistic Celebration of Chaldeo-Indian Church*, 207.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 31.

¹⁰⁵ *The Order of Raza*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 31. There are many other places in the pre-anaphoral part where the Church remembers the holy Apostles, like for example: Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 20.28.

witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in various contexts of their life and have reached the various grades of perfection.¹⁰⁷ Finally the departed ones are remembered. They are the nearest examples in bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

The Church is a gathering of the holy people. The gathering of the *Qurbānā* celebration is the culmination of this sanctity experience. Through the celebration of the *Qurlānā*, the Church proclaims her holiness and her vocation to sanctify the world.

8. Faith in the Remission of Sins

The aim of incarnation and redemption is the reconciliation of human beings with God. The Son of Man died and resurrected for the remission of our sins. Through the institution of *Qurlānā*, Jesus gave his Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:26-29). This means that the main thrust of the Salvific actions of Jesus is healing the broken relationship between human beings and their creator, God the Father (Rom 5:10). This understanding of the reconciliation is present in the Church from the very early period. In the Eastern Churches the notion of 'remission of sins' has got a wider meaning than merely confession and absolution of sins. "In the

Eastern Churches the remission of sins is experienced not only through the sacrament of reconciliation but also through Baptism, *Qurlānā*, Anointing of the sick and other liturgical services".¹⁰⁸

Remission of sins is an important theme in the teachings of the Fathers. In the writings of the Eastern Church Fathers, the remission of sins or the notion of reconciliation is depicted in the symbolic language of restoration, redemption and salvation.¹⁰⁹ The "Coal of Fire" is an important image that Mar Aprem uses to establish the saving and reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 6:6, we find this image of 'Coal of Fire' and Mar Aprem took it over from this text and introduced Jesus/*Qurlānā* as 'Coal of Fire' through which the 'thorns and thistles' of humanity are burned away.¹¹⁰ Another important image used by Aprem is that of 'Medicine of Life'. Through the image of 'Medicine of Life', Mar Aprem establishes that Jesus is the 'reconciliation' for the humanity.¹¹¹ It is Jesus who heals the wounds and pains of humanity and establishes and regains the primordial sinless stage of humanity. According to Gregory of Nazianus remission of sins happens as a result of the Holy *Qurlānā*.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 31.

¹⁰⁸ T. V. THARAKANVEED, «Remission of Sins and Reconciliation through the participation in the West-Syrian Eucharistic Liturgy», *Ephrem's Theological Journal*, 10 (2006) 18.

¹⁰⁹ THARAKANVEED, «Remission of Sins and Reconciliation through the participation in the West-Syrian Eucharistic Liturgy», 18.

¹¹⁰ Cf. EPHREM, *Das heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (Hymns on Faith), 10.

¹¹¹ Cf. EPHREM, *Das heiligen Ephraem des Syrers* (Hymns on Nisibis), 11.

¹¹² Cf. GREGORIUS NAZIANZENUS, *Orationes*, ed. J.P. Migne (PG 35), Migne, Paris 1857, 640.

The Syro-Malabar Church strongly believes in the remission of sins, and the faithful can attain this forgiveness of sins especially through the celebration of the *Qurlānā*. This is very clearly expressed in the different prayers recited by the priest and community during the pre-anaphoral part. In the Lord's Prayer which is recited at the beginning of the celebration, the celebrating community prays that: "forgive our debts and sins as we have forgiven those who offended us".¹¹³ There are five incensations during the celebration of the Syro-Malabar *Qurlānā* - three in the pre-anaphoral part,¹¹⁴ one at the beginning of the anaphora¹¹⁵ and one in the post anaphoral part.¹¹⁶ These incenses symbolise the remission of sins. The prayers for blessing the incense highlight these symbolisms. While blessing the incense for the first time, the celebrant prays; "so that it may be most pleasing to you, and obtain remission of the debts of the sheep of your flock".¹¹⁷ The Church offers the incense for the pardon of our debts and sins. Before the Gospel reading the celebrant blesses the incense and prays; "O Lord, may the sweet scent which wafted forth from you when Mary, the sinner, poured fragrant ointment on your head, be mingled with this incense which we offer in

your honor, for the pardon of our debts and sins".¹¹⁸

In the *Turgamma* before the Epistle, the deacons proclaim; "A treasure of happiness, the Lord has opened before those that seek it and has said, 'Oh! you sinners come and get back the bond of your debts'.¹¹⁹ Here the sinners are invited to get pardon from the sins. Again in the *Turgamma* before the Gospel proclamation the deacons confidently announce that; "It is worthy to be known that all nations are saved by him; believe firmly that all sins are forgiven through Him".¹²⁰ At the end of the *Karōzūfā* the celebrant standing at the *Bema* with hands extended prays for the remission of the debts of the people.¹²¹ It shows an attitude of submitting completely to the will of God from whom we get the pardon for our sins.

Our sinful minds and hearts are washed and cleansed in the immense ocean of the mercy of God. Before the 'Onīṭād' *Raz̄* the celebrant washes his hands at the *Bema* saying; "May God, the Lord of all remove the uncleanness of our debts and our sins by the sprinkling of his compassion, and may He wash away the stains of our offences in the immense ocean of His mercy".¹²² Lord wipes

¹¹³ *The Order of Raza*, 2.

¹¹⁴ *The Order of Raza*, 10,17,23.

¹¹⁵ *The Order of Raza*, 37.

¹¹⁶ *The Order of Raza*, 46.

¹¹⁷ *The Order of Raza*, 10.

¹¹⁸ *The Order of Raza*, 17.

¹¹⁹ *The Order of Raza*, 15.

¹²⁰ *The Order of Raza*, 19.

¹²¹ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 25.

¹²² *The Order of Raza*, 29.

away the stains of our sins through His mercy and grace. While he dries the hands, the celebrant says; "May the Lord wipe away the stains of our sins through His grace and mercy. Amen".¹²³ It cannot be considered a symbol of only the celebrant's internal purification, but of the whole liturgical assembly whom he represents. The prayer in the plural form is a confirmation of this assumption.

Remission of sins is the fruit of the redemptive act of Christ. Now, this saving experience is enjoyed in and through the life of the Church. In the celebration of the *Qūrlānā*, the fruit of this redemptive act, that is to say, the remission of sins is accessible. The *Qūrlānā* is not only a sacrifice, but also a sacrificial banquet that prepares us for the day when we shall share the same with God in heaven. Through the participation and the reception of the Holy Mysteries, this union with the Holy Trinity takes place. The union with the holy Trinity happens only with a life which has no blot of sins. It is the power of the *Qūrlānā* that washes the stains and blot of our sinful life.

9. Faith in Life after Death

Faith in life after Death means faith in the resurrection of the human beings and the new life in the Kingdom of Jesus. The resurrection is necessary on account of human nature, for first of all, man was created for

eternity, and secondly, he consists of body and soul. Jesus said; "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day" (Jn 6:54). It is the faith which the ancient Church kept and transferred. According to Acts. 23:6, it was for the 'hope and the resurrection of the dead' that Paul felt himself to be on trial. There are many other examples for life after death in the scriptures.¹²⁴ The purpose of Christians' 'coming to life again' is that they may 'reign with Christ' (Rev.20:4). The resurrection from the dead and the idea of *parousia* is treated as much as equal in the Church. "The resurrection of Christians and the *parousia* of Christ are essentially one".¹²⁵ The fathers of the Church are well aware of the truth that our mortal body resurrected for an immortal life. Like Justin and Irenaeus, Theophilus of Antioch regards the immortality of the soul not as belonging to its nature but as a reward for keeping the commandments of God.¹²⁶

Qūrlānā is actually the celebration of Jesus' resurrection. It is always with the hope of 'the resurrection of the body' the Church celebrates the *Qūrlānā*.¹²⁷ Our life after death or the resurrection is always related to Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection is the basis for our resurrection. In the *Laku Mara*, the celebrating community proclaims thrice that "you (Jesus Christ) are the quickener of our

¹²³ *The Order of Raza*, 29.

¹²⁴ Cf. Rom. 6:5, 11, 7:4, 14, 8:11, 2Cor.5:4-5, 3:18, 1Cor.15:51-52, Phil.3:21,

¹²⁵ J.A.T. ROBINSON, «Resurrection of Christ», in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible-An Illustrated Encyclopedia*5, ed. G. A. Buttrick, Abingdon Press, New York 1962, 53.

¹²⁶ Cf. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, 1, 240.

¹²⁷ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 32.

bodies and the gracious savior of our souls.”¹²⁸ As we have mentioned before when the celebrating community recites the *Laku Mara*, they confess their faith in their own resurrection and life after death. The priestly prayer after the *Laku Mara* repeats the same truth by adding an adjective ‘indeed’. It says; “You O my Lord, are *indeed* the quickener of our bodies, the gracious savior of our souls and the constant preserver of our lives”.¹²⁹

Hearing of the Word of God is considered as a resource for the resurrection. In the *Turgamma* before the Gospel proclamation, the deacons repeat that those who hear the Word of God will rise again.¹³⁰ The dead ones are sleeping in the Lord with the hope of rising again. The ‘*Onifad’ Razy* during the presentation of the Mysteries at the *Madbhā* confess that; “all the dead have fallen asleep in you, in the hope that through your glorious resurrection you would raise them up again in glory”.¹³¹ Only after professing this faith the main celebrant approaches the *Madbhā*. Before approaching the Holy of holies to begin the anaphora, the celebrant together with the worshipping community proclaims their belief in the resurrection of the body through the Creed.¹³² The resurrection or life after death is regarded as crowning. In the *Kanōzū* after the Creed, the deacon recites that God will crown the dead at resurrection.¹³³ Thus the

Qurlānā of the Syro-Malabar Church is filled with the basic faith of the Church in life after death. The *Qurlānā* celebration is in a way a faith proclamation of the Church, where the belief in life after death is professed.

Conclusion

Our era is marked with challenges to Christian faith. A number of factors are there behind this crisis. One of the main issues is the lack of sufficient catechesis with regard to faith formation. As a result, faithful are in a dilemma what to believe and how to profess their faith. It is because of this confusion that people are wandering around other ‘communities’ who call themselves ‘true believers’. To understand the faith of an individual Church, we need to turn to its liturgy especially the *Qurlānā*. It is here that we find the true faith of the Church and this study was an attempt at the same. As we have seen, like any other particular Church, the Syro-Malabar Church has the Holy Trinity at the centre of its faith and this is marked with praise and thanks giving. The pre-anaphoral part treats each person of the Trinity separately. The Church confesses its faith in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and together with this true faith the prayers of the *Qurlānā* throw light into the role of the Church. The pre-anaphoral part also delves on the role of the Word of God and we

¹²⁸ *The Order of Raza*, 11.

¹²⁹ *The Order of Raza*, 12.

¹³⁰ Cf. *The Order of Raza*, 19-20.

¹³¹ *The Order of Raza*, 31.

¹³² *The Order of Raza*, 32.

¹³³ *The Order of Raza*, 33.

have already seen the reverence the Syro-Malabar Church ascribes to the Scripture.

The celebration of *Qūrbānā* is not a private act but a public one that also involves the participation of angels, saints, and the departed. In other words, the Syro-Malabar *Qūrlānā* proclaims the traditional faith in the angels, the communion of saints and life after the death. *Qūrlānā* as such is a communion—the communion of God and man. Man cannot attain this communion through an inferior standard of perfection and hence requires his sins to be remitted. This remission of sins is attained through the celebration and participation in the *Qūrlānā*.

From the above study, it is clear that *Qūrlānā* is the basis and its celebration is the perfect opening for catechesis. *Qūrlānā* as a whole is abundant with catechetical resources and through its celebration; the Syro-Malabar Church can profess and convey her basic faith. In other words, we can consider *Qūrlānā* as the means, source and content for catechesis. *Qūrlānā* is the source of catechesis because it is the constitutive element of the sacred tradition, the source of revelation. *Qūrlānā* celebration by its very nature demands conscious, active, communitarian, and full participation of the faithful. It in itself is profession of faith in action. *Qūrbānā* is catechesis in action not only during preaching of the Word but during its entire celebration. The arrangements of scriptural readings, hymns, prayers, symbols, rites etc. keep the faithful in direct contact with the sources of

their faith. Thus *Qūrlānā* establishes a dialogue between God and human beings and facilitates the growth of faith in each one of us. To simply put, *Qūrbānā* itself is a form of catechesis where faith formation and maturation become an ongoing process.

This study has contributed towards exploring the educative, formative and didactic nature of the *Qūrlānā* which in itself are the essential components of catechesis. Catechesis informs, forms and transforms the faithful and all these processes attain fulfillment during the celebration of *Qūrbānā*. The proclamation and communication of faith materialises when the *Qūrlānā* is celebrated according to the mind and tradition of the Church. Any attempt at ignoring or turning a blind eye on the same would only prove detrimental in the long run. The faithful of Syro-Malabar Church must understand and appreciate the richness in its *Qūrlānā* and realise how proper celebration of the same can help profess her faith. For this to take effect, it is imperative that each one understands the *Qūrlānā* well. The Syro-Malabar *Qūrlānā* is a ‘gold mine’ of Syriac treasures deeply rooted in true faith and theology fostered through the Apostle Mar Thoma and fathers Mar Aphrahat, Mar Aprem, Mar Narsai, Mar Theodore of Mopsuestia, Mar Nestorius, Mar Joseph Kariyattil, Paremmackal Thoma Kathanar, Nidheerickal Mani Kathanar, Placidachan etc. Now, the onus is on us to be involved and be part of this ‘mine’ in pursuit of pearls of Syriac tradition and faith.



A Moral Theological Reading of *The Acts of Thomas*

Dr. Dominic Vechoor

Introduction

The Acts of Thomas is a gem of the early Syriac literature and its theological importance is only being recognized by Scholars today.¹ It is an apocryphal work,² composed in the first half of the third century. The book has 13 chapters, describing the missionary and apostolic activities of St. Thomas in the Indo-Parthian Kingdom and concludes with the narration of the martyrdom of the Apostle. It is perhaps, one of the most valuable patristic sources of information that may throw light on the earliest mode of Christian moral living in the Syriac tradition and in the Thomistic Churches, originated from the Gospel preaching of St. Thomas. It gives a number of theological orientations, which are ever relevant to the faith and moral life of the

Christian believers. This brief study is an attempt to bring out the moral theological implications of *The Acts of Thomas*.

1. New Hermeneutical Methodology in the Post-Conciliar Catholic Moral Theology

One of the main theological contributions of the ecumenical Council of Vatican II was the re-discovery of the Church as a communion of individual Churches (*ecclesia sui iuris*).³ The Catholic character of the Church with her essential unity and legitimate diversity in the context of the cultural and ecclesial diversity and in the light of communion ecclesiology, is said to be a hallmark of the post-Vatican theological thinking. In this fiftieth year of the publication of the key reference texts for the communion

¹ J. KALLARANGATT, "The *Acts of Thomas* Deserves More Theological and Ecclesiological Attention", *Christian Orient*, 18 (1996), 3-18; G. NEDUMGATT, "The Apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* and Christian Origins in India", *Gregorianum* 92 (2011), 553-557. For a detailed recent study on the history and theology of the *Acts of Thomas*, see P. MATTATHIL, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology: Pneumatology of Ephrem the Syrian* (unpublished thesis, defended in the Catholic Institute of Paris & Catholic University of Leuven, 2011), 51-88.

² The word 'Apocrypha' literally means 'hidden' or 'not genuine'. Generally, it refers to those non-canonical Christian writings from the second to the fourth centuries, which aim to supplement and revise, what the canonical Gospels tell us of Jesus's birth, life and teachings and of the missionary activities of the Apostles.

³ For a detailed understanding of the communion ecclesiology of Vatican II, see X. Koodapuzha, ed. *Communion of Churches* (Kottayam, 1993); M. VELLANICKAL, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches, Biblico-Theological Perspectives in the Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Mumbai, 2009).

ecclesiology of Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, all three documents published on 21 November 1964), we believe that this present study is all the more relevant.

A pluralistic approach to theology has been proposed by Vatican II as a new hermeneutical methodology to courageously address the emerging issues of faith and morals in the contemporary context of Christian life. The traditional moral thinking in the Catholic Church has been for the most part determined by the Latin (Western) theological perspectives, especially by the scholastic theological and the Aristotelian philosophical categories. While we fully appreciate the wisdom and genius of this rich cultural and ecclesial tradition, we have to bear in mind that there are also profound moral theological notions, coming from other cultural and ecclesial heritages. It is the right time now to become familiarized with other theological traditions, both Eastern and Western.⁴ As St. John Paul II rightly observes, “the Church by God’s providence, gathered

in the one Spirit, breathes as though with two lungs, of the East and of the West, and burns with the love of Christ in one heart, having two ventricles”⁵.

A ‘tripartite approach to Christian theology’-the Syriac Orient, the Greek East and the Latin West-as inheriting the three basic theological traditions of Christianity,⁶ has now become well accepted among the Catholic theologians. We should understand these different theological traditions as mutually complementing. Too often in the past, one theological tradition has tried to dominate the other, thus creating a serious imbalance and impoverishment of the Christian tradition. Each tradition needs to recognize the value of the other traditions and thus be enriched by them.⁷

A pluralistic, dynamic and realistic approach to theology and a going back to the authentic and valid sources of theology are said to be two distinguishing characteristics of the theological thinking in the post-conciliar period. A study on *The Acts of Thomas* becomes timely in this context.

⁴Cfr. B. PETRÀ, “Church *sui iuris*, Ethos and Moral Theology” in *Church and Its Most Basic Element*, ed. P. Pallath (Rome, 1995), 161-178; D. VECCHIOR, “Catholic Moral Theology in the Light of Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II; Promises and Challenges” in *New Horizons in Christian Ethics: Reflections from India*, ed., S.Kanniyakonil (Bangalore, 2014).

⁵JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *SacriCanones*, 18 October 1990, AAS 82 (1990), 1033-1044. For details see, B. PETRÀ, “Church with ‘Two Lungs’: Adventures of a Metaphor”, *Ephrem’s Theological Journal* 6 (2002), 111-127.

⁶Cfr. S. BROCK, “The Syriac Orient: A Third ‘Lung’ for the Church”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 71 (2005), 5.

⁷Cfr. International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (2011), nos. 5, 74-85, 99.

2. *The Acts of Thomas: An Early Masterpiece of the Syriac Literature*

Acts of Thomas is an early masterpiece of the Syriac prose literature, written in Edessa in the first half of the third century. This work is believed to be originally composed in Syriac in Edessa. It is easily readable like a drama or novel. The missionary activities and the martyrdom of St. Thomas are beautifully narrated in it. Most of the narrations in the *Acts of Thomas* clearly reflect the 'twin' (*Thoma/Didymus*) characteristics of Apostle Thomas and Lord Jesus Christ. It is a scholarly approved fact that the *Acts of Thomas* has Mesopotamian, Jewish, Judeo-Christian and Gnostic backgrounds and influences. It is said to be a Christian-Gnostic prose in the Oriental novel literature.⁸ The book is organized as a good narrative story with a cryptic style, always having a hidden meaning.

Though it is an apocryphal work, it bears unique historical and theological significance.⁹ It is historical in the sense that it is one of the earliest documents that deal with the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas and his martyrdom in India.¹⁰ However, the authorship, chronology of the events narrated in the book and the geography of the book,

etc. are not very clear. At the same time, they are not to be understood as mere stories or fictions but composed, based on traditions, existing in those Churches, founded by St. Thomas. The author, most probably, belonged to the sect of Bardaissan in Edessa.¹¹ However, the author's main intention is to state that the Apostle Thomas came to India. Even if there are differences of opinion about the authorship and historicity of the text, scholars unanimously agree that it is profoundly theological in the sense that it contains a mosaic of valid and orthodox theological doctrines, although false or heterodox views are also sometimes found in the book. The theological methodology used in the text is more symbolic and doxological in nature. It contains many foundational doctrines of early Christianity. It is a remarkable synthesis of the Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, sacramental theology, eschatology and the ascetical lifestyle of the Syriac tradition.¹²

3. Moral Theological Significance of *The Acts of Thomas*

Vatican II understands Christian (faith and moral) life primarily as a 'life in Christ' (OT, 16). This 'life in Christ' is so rich a reality

⁸ J. KALLARANGATT, "The Acts of Thomas", 6.

⁹ J. KALLARANGATT, "The Acts of Thomas", 10-11.

¹⁰ J. VELLIAN, ed. *The Syrian Churches Series, Vol. I: The Apostle Thomas in India according to the Acts of Thomas* (Kottayam, 1972)

¹¹ J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, Vol. I, 139.

¹² J. KALLARANGATT, "The Acts of Thomas", 11-18.

that there are as many valid theological approaches to it as there are to the mystery of Jesus Christ. The Council Fathers affirm this fact, when they say that the Church is blessed with different 'mode of Christian living', 'ordering of Christian life', 'way of life' and 'spiritual patrimony' within the different cultural and ecclesial traditions of the Church (Cfr. LG, 23; OE, 1; UR, 16-17; see also *Orientale Lumen*, 5-6). The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches states: "A rite is a liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage, differentiated by the culture and the circumstances of the history of the peoples, which is expressed by each Church *sui iuris* in its own manner of living the faith (*modus proprius fidei vivendae*" (Can. 28). The ethos (mode of living) of a culture as a mode of living and rite are closely related to the Church *sui iuris*. As B. Petra explains, rites are a 'Christian sign of a culture' and a 'cultural sign of Christianity'.¹³

Hence it is presumably clear that the Syriac tradition also has a unique 'mode of living the Christian faith', echoing her unique cultural and ecclesial milieu. As far as we are concerned, early patristic period was a time of self-definition for Christian faith and morals. The early Christian ideals were reflected in the writings of these periods. In like manner, *Acts of Thomas* is a valuable

patristic source of information regarding the mode of Christian living, existed in the early Syriac Christianity.

4. Moral Theological Teachings Reflected in *The Acts of Thomas*

After having understood the theological context of our study and the theological and moral theological importance of the *Acts of Thomas*, we now try to understand the basic orientations of Christian moral life, reflected in the *Acts of Thomas*.

4.1. Christian Moral Life as a Life in Christ

In line with the biblical understanding, the Eastern Churches primarily understand Christian moral life as a 'life in Christ'.¹⁴ This life in Christ grows through the assimilation of man into Christ and to his Gospel ethos, which is the basis of all Christian moral norms. Such a life in Christ is nurtured by the sacraments of the Church and manifests itself as a progressive deification of the faithful into the Trinitarian communion by the action of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ So this life in Christ has Christological, Trinitarian and Pneumatological dimensions.

Christological dimension of moral life is also emphasized in the *Acts of Thomas*. Christian life is understood as a life in Christ,

¹³ B. PETRÀ, "Church *sui iuris*, Ethos and Moral Theology", 168.

¹⁴ B. PETRÀ, "Moral Theology in the Orthodox Tradition", 13. This is quite in line with the Vatican II understanding of Christian moral life as 'life in Christ' (OT, 16).

¹⁵ B. PETRÀ, "Teologia morale e scienze liturgiche", in *Liturgia: Itinerari di ricerca, scienza liturgica e discipline teologiche in dialogo* (Roma, 1997), 363.

who is the real 'master' of life. In the first chapter of the Acts, when Apostle Thomas is asked by Habban, the merchant, he says: "He (Jesus) is my master".¹⁶ Again in the third chapter, the young man, healed by Apostle Thomas, was gradually brought to a new 'life in Christ' (III, 34-38). In the seventh chapter, Thomas invites the Captain and his family to abide in their faith in Christ: "My sons and brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus, abide in this faith and trust in our Lord Jesus the Messiah, him whom I preach unto you; and let your hope be in him and he will keep you and fall not away from him because he will not forsake you...".¹⁷

4.2. Bridal Imagery of the Christian Moral Life

Bridal imagery of this life in Christ is also seen in the *Acts of Thomas*. Christian life is understood as a life of betrothal to Christ. In the tenth chapter of the Acts, through the words of Mygdonia, this idea is made clear: "...that was the time of the beginning; this is the time of the end. That was the time of the temporal life, which passes away; this is the time of the life everlasting. That was the time of the transitory joy; this is the time of eternal joy...the marriage feast you see passes away but this marriage feast shall never pass away. That was the marriage feast of corruption; this is the marriage feast of life

everlasting...that was the bridal chamber, which was taken down; this is the bridal chamber, which remains forever...".¹⁸ *The Acts of Thomas* also gives a solid Christology and soteriology from the Syriac perspective through the different Christological titles like 'Lord', 'healer of the sick souls', 'giver of life', 'physician without fee', etc. described in the various prayers and hymns of the Acts (I, 10; IV, 39-40; V, 45, 47-50; XII, 143; XIII, 156).

4.3. Eschatological Orientation of Christian Moral Life

Christian life is presented as an eschatological journey. The transitory nature of this world and 'the everlasting life in the world to come' are frequently referred to in the Acts (II, 21; see also I, 10; VI, 61; X, 124, 127; XI, 135). Acts I, 14-15 speaks about Jesus Christ as the 'incorruptible and true bridegroom' and as the 'heavenly bridegroom'. This is in keeping with the early Church's expectation of the imminent *parousia* of the Lord.

4.4. Ascetical Life as an Aid to Christian Moral Life

Early Syriac Christianity in all its manifestations was based on strong ascetical tendencies, known especially for its enthusiasm for virginity.¹⁹ Ascetical life was a power house for the flourishing of the

¹⁶ A.F. J. KLIJN, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text and Commentary*, Leiden, 1962 (Hereafter AT), I, 2.

¹⁷ AT, VIII, 66; see also AT, XIV, 160.

¹⁸ AT, X, 124.

¹⁹ K. McVEY, ed. *Ephrem the Syrian, The Selected Prose Works* (Washington D. C., 1994), 11; R. C. BONDI, "The Spirituality of the Syriac Speaking Christians" in *Christian Spirituality: From the Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. B. McGinn & J. Meyendorff (London, 1986), 153-157.

ecclesial life.²⁰ As R. Murray says, no other characteristics are likely to strike a modern reader more immediately than its asceticism, moderate or extreme, dominating or at least colouring almost all the literature.²¹ After having made a detailed study of the various forces and structures in the development of early Syriac theology, H. J. W. Drijvers observes: "they have one thing in common: a strong emphasis on asceticism, the command of the body and its passions in order to create room for the divine spirit, truth and wisdom."²² The early Syriac Christians were familiar with the various ascetical trends seen in the Semitic world, Judaism and among the Judaeo-Christian groups of the early period. Here the observation of K. McVey is worth mentioning. She says: "Certainly one fact agreed upon by scholars is that early Syriac Christianity in all its manifestations seems to have been based on strong ascetical tendencies. It was this same asceticism that underlies the Encratism of Tatian, the asceticism of Mani and the absolute sexual renunciation demanded by the *Acts of Thomas*. This ascetic tendency affected not only the fringe sects but also exerted a strong influence on the mainline community".²³

Ascetical vocabularies like fasting, prayer, abstinence, virginity, singleness, almsgiving, etc. are very frequent in the *Acts of Thomas*. An ascetical life style is always suggested as the means for a holy life and thereby for salvation. The concept of free will and the thinking that fasting cleanses us from the filth of the body and prayer from the filth of soul is a very strong theme in it. The regaining of the original state of harmony through the right use of mind and will and through various ascetical practices is frequently seen in Syriac literature. Repentance is also a frequent theme in the Acts. We see a continuous plea for divine mercy and forgiveness of sins (II, 17-29; III, 38; V, 48, 58-59). Repentance is suggested as the true medicine for the sickness of sin (I, 14; II, 28).

Syriac asceticism was not merely negative but positive. S. Brock observes: "Far from being the outcome of a dualistic world view and a negative attitude to the body, these ascetic ideals in fact imply a very biblical and positive attitude towards the human person as body cum soul, with great value attached to the sanctity of the body and emphasis laid on the interpenetration of the physical and spiritual worlds...."²⁴

²⁰ R. MURRAY, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 11, 154-157.

²¹ R. MURRAY, "The Characteristics of the Early Syriac Christianity" in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, eds. N. G. Garsoian et al (Washington D. C., 1980), 6.

²² H. J. W. DRIJVERS, *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London, 1984), I, 18.

²³ K. McVEY, ed. *Ephrem the Syrian: The Selected Prose Works*, 11-12.

²⁴ S. BROCK, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life*, xxv.

4.5. Liturgico-Sacramental Character of Christian moral Life

The liturgico-sacramental character of the moral life is also an essential characteristic of the Eastern tradition.²⁵ The profound unity that exists between moral life and the sacraments is now generally accepted by all. The Christian moral life, namely, life in Christ, is born of and nurtured by the mysteries (sacraments) of the Church especially by the divine liturgy, in which 'life in Christ' manifests itself as a progressive 'deification' of the faithful by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Liturgy is the expression and celebration of Christian moral living in the concrete context of day to day life, which is the fountain and summit of the Church's activities and Christian life (SC, 9-10; VS, 21; CCC, 2031). There is a sacramental itinerary in Christian life. The Christian existence can be better interpreted in the light of the sacraments.²⁶

Acta Thomae is one of the earliest document that refers to the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Those who are moved by the preaching of the word of God, feel repentance over their sins and receive Baptism. This text calls Baptism 'sign', an earliest patristic term, referring to baptism (II, 26; IX, 87; X, 120). Those who are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity are

gradually led to the Eucharistic table (II, 25-29; V, 48-50; X, 121-122, 131-133).

The Christian tradition has long expressed the profound relationship between liturgy and theology in terms of the normative principle *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer establishes the law of faith and vice versa. The traditional principle of theology could also be further expanded to include the *lex vivendi*; thus we can say *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. Moral life and worship are not two distinct realities but are closely interrelated. Liturgy as the celebration of the faith, morals and ethos of the people of God, is the place, where theology, ethics and spirituality are contained and expressed.

4.6. Ecclesial Dimension of Moral Life

The references to the communitarian and ecclesial dimension of Christian life are seen in the Acts (II, 25-29, III, 37; VI, 59). Those who received Baptism and shared the Eucharistic fellowship became a community. It was basically a Eucharistic or worshipping community. The narration on the martyrdom of St. Thomas ends with a reference to a first Christian community, founded in his place of martyrdom. This faith community was also conscious of the Sunday celebration (III, 29, 31). The Church is presented as 'daughter of light' (I, 6-7, 16). Various symbols like flock,

²⁵ B. PETRA, "Teologia morale e scienze liturgiche", 366.

²⁶ Cfr. L.M. CHAUVET, *Symbols and Sacrament: A Sacramental Re-interpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, 1995).

fold, adorned bride, virgin, maiden, place of refuge, etc. are also seen in the different chapters of *The Acts of Thomas*.

4.7. Concept of Marriage and Marital Fidelity

Generally saying, *Acts of Thomas* gives not a very positive picture on marriage and sexual union. Marriage and sexual intimacy are presented as something unclean, heinous and unspiritual and therefore it instructs the Christians to refrain from them. In chapter I, 12, we read: "Remember my children...as soon as you preserve yourself from this filthy intercourse, you become pure temples and are saved from afflictions, manifest and hidden and from the heavy care of children, the end of whom is bitter sorrow...But you will be persuaded by me and keep yourselves pure unto God; you shall have living children to whom not one of these blemishes and hurts come nigh and you shall be without care, grief and sorrow and you shall be hoping for the time, when you shall see the true wedding feast and you shall be in the praisers of God and shall be numbered with those who enter into the bridal chamber"²⁷ This pessimistic picture of marriage can be understood in its historical context of the influence of the dualist thinking, prevalent in the then existing philosophical trends of Stoicism, Gnosticism and Manicheanism. This also may be understood in the light of the

pre-occupation of the early Christians with the eschatological realities.

Even though the main stream of thinking about marriage in the *Acts of Thomas* is negative, this book is also positive about marriage and marital fidelity. The fact that marriage imagery itself is taken to present the spiritual reality of eschatological life is to be understood as a positive approach to marriage and marital realities. Besides, this text also refers to marriage and marital acts as willed by God the Creator. In chapter VI, 55, we read: "...those who transgress the law, which change the sexual union that has been appointed by God, will go to the torment...". The text speaks about the marital fidelity. Those who are unfaithful to their marital partners will inherit punishments (VI, 56; VIII, 76-79). In the words of the captain, narrated in the sixth Act, "I have a wife and daughter and I love her as nature too teaches..." (n.62). As S. Brock observes, "...marriage was equally seen as a state whose truly sacred character was something which wife and husband should constantly strive to establish. Moreover it is important to remember that those who chose the life of virginity here on earth were by no means rejecting marriage as something inferior but only postponing it to the *eschaton* (last things), when the wedding feast with Christ the bridegroom would take place, for at baptism the soul had been betrothed to Christ".²⁸

²⁷ See also AT, V, 43; VI, 52; IX, 84, 88

²⁸ S. BROCK, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life*, xxv.

The book also speaks about the natural moral law, willed by God the creator (VII, 67; VIII, 70). This can be considered as a patristic reference to natural moral law, though of course, not in a detailed manner as in the scholastic terms.

4.8. Concept of Virginity

Since the main thrust of the Acts is ascetical life, we see in them generally a preference for virginity over marriage. In chapter I, 14, we read: "...I am in great love and I am praying to my Lord that I may continue in this love, which I have experienced this night and may call for the incorruptible Bridegroom, who has revealed himself to me this night... This deed of corruption is despised by me and the spoils of this wedding feast that passes away because I am invited to the true wedding feast and that I have not had the intercourse with a husband, the end whereof is bitter repentance because I am betrothed to the true husband".²⁹

The book of the Acts speaks very highly of 'virginity' and 'life of holiness'. This has led some modern scholars to suppose that the early authors held a very low view of sexuality and marriage. S. Brock argues that this interpretation is extremely misguided. For the Syriac Fathers, the ideals of virginity and holiness were 'periods of preparation' (Ex,

19: 9-15; Gen, 7-8) and this provides a pointer to one of the main motivating forces which led people to undertake these ascetic views at baptism, namely, the concept of Christ as the heavenly bridegroom. This ideal of virginity was seen as concomitant of betrothal to the heavenly bridegroom to serve him with 'single mindedness of life'.³⁰ The preference for virginity and absolute singleness of life (*ibidyoosa; ibidaya; monogenes*) in East Syriac theology are also to be understood in the context of the ascetical emphasis of the Syriac tradition.³¹

As R. Murray says the ascetical life style of the Syriac Churches reflects the eschatological character of the Christian life, the passionate longing for the 'heavenly bridegroom and heavenly bridal chamber' that had characterised most of the Judeo-Christian literature. The Church looks for fulfilment in the eschatological kingdom or paradise.³² This eschatological and paschal orientation is especially clear in the Oriental tradition.³³ The very outlook of a Christian is eschatological, eagerly awaiting the second coming of Jesus. The common tradition of the early Church in praying facing the East and the liturgical posture of standing that manifests the pilgrim character of the people of God, show the eschatological orientation of Christian life.

²⁹ See also AT, I, 15; VI, 52

³⁰ S. BROCK, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 54.

³¹ S. BROCK, "The Syriac Orient: A Third lung for the Church", OCP 71 (2005), 9-12.

³² R. MURRAY, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 343-346.

³³ J. KALLARANGATT, "Dimensions and Perspectives of Oriental Theology" in *Eastern Theological Reflections*, ed. X. Koodapuzha (Kottayam, 1999), 103-104; R. TAFT, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Rome, 1997), 158-159.

4.9. Christian Moral Life as a Life of Virtues

A rich Christian moral life with the practice of virtues is seen in this work. Syriac theologians very often speak of the need of discipline of the body and heart, self-control, modesty and temperance.³⁴ In the final discourse of Apostle Thomas before martyrdom, he reminds: "...believe in this God, whom I preach and walk not in your hardness of heart but walk in all virtues that become the freedom and the glory of men and the life that is with God" (n. 166). Christian life is presented as a life of charity, by which Christians build palaces in heaven (II, 19; VIII, 66). Faith, hope, charity, purity, innocence, humility, self-control, modesty and temperance are presented as the basic virtues (IX, 85, 94).

4.10. Unified vision of Christian Life

A unified vision of Christian moral life, as we see in Acts, 2, 46, is very strong in *Acts of Thomas* as well. Christian life is understood as a 'life in Christ' with a single and harmonious organic unity. No dichotomy between faith, worship, Christian living and spirituality is seen in it. Everything is to be understood and evaluated in a faith context. Dichotomy or separation between various branches of theology is of later origin. In the Acts, we see a lived-in-moral theology than a systematic treatment on moral concepts. Christianity is above all a 'way of life' (*marga*) rather than a 'set of doctrines'. Morality is faith lived and faith lived is morality.

Conclusion

This study has convinced us that there is a strong moral theological thinking that lies hidden in the Syriac sources. Just as each theological tradition has its own liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, it will have its own moral theological perspectives as well, drawn from the proper cultural and ecclesial milieu. Since the Church of Christ manifests herself equally in her Eastern and Western traditions, we need to appreciate the theological genius and wisdom of both East and West. We also believe that the creative theological thinking on the ethical dimension of individual Churches would enhance the genuine quest for their identity within the Catholic communion. This study also invites us to plentifully draw from the three equally important streams of Christian tradition for a Catholic understanding of the moral theology. It also inspires us to have our appreciation and love for the Syriac sources, language and culture. The patristic orientations, seen in the *Acts of Thomas* will assist us to address also the post-modern issues related to human life, human person, human sexuality, marriage and family, social ethics, etc. These orientations will also contribute for the renewal of Christian life, envisioned by Vatican II and constantly reminded by the constant magisterium of the Church, especially by the Holy Father Pope Francis for a genuine pastoral and missionary commitment to Jesus Christ, his Gospel and his Church.

³⁴ S. BROCK, *Luminous Eye*, 20-22.



Book Review

Alois Grillmeier -Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/3, Oxford, 2013, pp. xxv+6709 (trans. by Marianne Ehrhardt)

Prof. A. Grillmeier conceived of a series of books entitled, "Christ in Christian Tradition". The first version appeared in 1965 in English on request of Prof. Leslie Cross, Oxford, as an enlargement of the first chapter in "Das Konzil von Chalkedon" volume 1. When the second edition of "Christ in Christian Tradition" was published in 1975, it was already numbered volume 1, indicating that Grillmeier planned other volumes. It was a real research programme to make this study of Christology, from the New Testament up to 800, with an increasing emphasis on the specific Christological idea of the respective local churches and in an ecumenical interest. Vol. 1 was a history of Patristic Christology. Grillmeier divided the whole work into three vols. But vol. 2 appeared to be a massive task. It was to be a journey into hitherto largely uncharted territory. So vol. II was eventually divided into 5 parts.

There appeared already in English vol. 2/1 (1987), vol. 2/2 (1995), and vol. 2/4(1996). The direction of the project was passed already in 1994 from Grillmeier to his collaborator for many years, Prof. Dr. Dr. Theresia Hainthaler. Prof. Cardinal Alois Grillmeier died in 1998. Vol. 2/3 appeared

in German under the sole editorship of Prof. Dr. Dr. Theresia Hainthaler in 2002. The present work is the English version of the German edition. Vol. 2/5 is under preparation and is yet to be published in German and English. It deals with the Persian and Caucasian (Armenian, Georgian and Albanian) Churches. All these volumes deal with Post – Chalcedonian Christology. Vol. 2/2 deals with the Christology in Constantinople, and vol. 2/4 with the Christology in Alexandria, Nubia and Ethiopia.

Vol. 2/3 (the present volume) concerns the geographical area of Jerusalem and Antioch. It is a collaborative work with contributions from Cardinal A. Grillmeier himself, T. Hainthaler, Tanios Bou Mansour and Luise Abramowski. It deals with the Christological development in Palestine and in the Patriarchate of Antioch. It concerns itself with the important persons who shaped the Christological thought in these areas during the post – Chalcedonian period. It has to be taken together with the already published previous parts of vol. 2. Some of the important theologians who shaped the history in these regions and influenced the faithful during this period are dealt with in the previous volumes.

It is a Christological compendium of the period. The important writers in the Palestinian region and Antiochean region are

selected and their Christology is analysed. It was a very difficult task to analyse the writings of individual authors and evaluate their Christological contributions. It is at the same time a history of Christology also. Palestine includes the three Roman provinces (Palestina I, II and III), Gaza, Sinai and part of Arabia. Antioch includes almost all the territories under the Patriarchate of Antioch after the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

This volume attempts to view how the leading figures of the Eastern Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Antioch conceived of the figure of Christ during the post Chalcedonian period and how it influenced the life of the faithful there. It helps us to understand the ancient forms of Christianity in this region during this period and for the recovery of the wholeness of the Church in Christological matters. A lot of Christological materials are presupposed in this volume. Only a student of Patristic history and Christology can follow easily the development of the thought. That is to say, an acquaintance with all the volumes in this series is necessary for a proper and adequate understanding of the matter discussed here.

The book is divided into two parts:

1. Christology in Palestine after Chalcedon until the Rise of Islam. It has four chapters.

2. Christology in the Patriarchate of Antioch after 451 to the end of the 6th century. It has three Sections and 14 chapters. Section one has 7 chapters, section two has 4 chapters dealing with Greek theology and section three has 3 chapters dealing with Syriac theology.

Since Antioch was bilingual, there were Greek writers and Syriac writers in the region.

After Chalcedon (451) the Church was divided into Chalcedonian and non Chalcedonian. Eventually there were attempts to reunite both the parties and new formulations and propositions were introduced by the Emperors and theologians. As a result there emerged a neo-Chalcedonian Christology in the East and we find the echo of it in the writings of some of the leaders of the region. By the end of the 6th century, one can notice convergence in the formulations of the writers in both the camps in the direction of neo-Chalcedonism.

During the period under discussion (451-637), Jerusalem was a monastic and liturgical centre and its influence in Christology is discussed in the first section of this book. In Palestine there were Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians and the conflict is apparent among them. The Monks in Palestine had a decisive role in this conflict. The monks and their leaders controlled the faithful. The biographers of the monastic leaders present their heroes as Chalcedonians.

Immediately after 451, Palestine was a stronghold of resistance against the definition of Chalcedon with Theodosius their leader. But when Juvenal could regain his Patriarchate, Jerusalem became clearly Chalcedonian and by the end of the 6th century, Chalcedon was generally accepted in Palestine as a whole. Euthymius and Sabas played a decisive role in shaping the faith of the monks and the people. They influenced also the Arabs in Palestine and Gaza. In Sinai we find Theodore of Raithu, John Moschus and John Climacus,

showing signs of neo-Chalcedonism. Procopius of Gaza followed the line of the monastic fathers in Jerusalem. In Gaza in addition to Procopius, we find Abba Isaiah, a certain John and Dorotheos, but not all of them engaged in Christological controversies. Together with the Christological controversy, there was also the Origenist controversy, very strong in Palestine. It was widely spread among the monks.

Part two of this book deals with the Antiochene Patriarchate. The leading figures, important ecclesiastical centres and important schools of thought are extensively discussed. The most important leaders, who contributed to Christology in the Antiochene Patriarchate, were Diodore, Theodore, Nestorius and Theodoret. During the post - Chalcedonian period, we find both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians in the Patriarchate and split of the hierarchy into two based on Chalcedon. The first anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch was Peter, the Fuller. He initiated the fight for the theopaschite addition to the Trisagion. After Peter, the struggle for the Trisagion becomes a struggle against the doctrine of two natures, under Philoxenus of Mabbug. The leading anti-Chalcedonians were Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, Simeon of Beth Arsam. The book deals with the Schools of Antioch, Edessa and Nisibis in summary form.

Since Antioch was bilingual, there is a section (section 2) on Greek Theology. Under this title comes the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus, Ephrem of Antioch, Anastasius, and controversy among the Severians. Ephrem stood for Chalcedon, and in fact he was a

neo-Chalcedonian. He made use of the “*mia physis*” formula, the expressions “*Christus synthetos*”, “hypostatic union” and “one of the Trinity”- all neo-Chalcedonian expressions. Anastasius accepted the doctrine of two natures. He made a distinction between *physis* and *hypostasis*. He explained the union as *synthetos* as that of body and soul. It is, according to him, a mixture and *synapheia*.

Severus' views were explained already in the previous volume (2/2). During this period there were several controversies among the Severians. The conflicts are dealt with in ch. 4 of this section. Severus of Antioch wrote in Greek. His influence embraced all the Eastern Patriarchates. He puts his mark on the anti-Chalcedonian dogmas more than any other. Among the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarchs of Antioch, Severus alone stands out as a Theologian. He was the only theologian of the group. For the anti-Chalcedonians, Severus is the authority. The authority of Severus' theology is seen in the Tritheist dispute.

The importance of Philosophy during this period is to be recognised. The Corpus Dionysiacum presents a new Platonic image of Christ. This Corpus became authoritative across all denominational boundaries. In the beginning, Hypatius of Ephesus challenged it. But it spread rapidly. Philosophy, in fact, intruded especially the anti-Chalcedonian camp and it is partly responsible for their fragmentation, especially in the second half of the sixth century. It is partly responsible for Tritheism and the controversy about Probus and John Barbur. The study of Philosophy among the Syrians was promoted by John Philoponus and Sergius of Resaina.

Section 3 deals with Syriac Christology of Jacob of Sarug and Philoxenus of Mabbug. They are normally included among the anti-Chalcedonians. Jacob's Christology was shaped by the Alexandrian formulations. Both of them wrote in Syriac. Although he was Antiochene, he was Alexandrian and Cyrilian in his formulations. But in reality he was more a poet and not a controversialist. He could be considered a mid way between the two factions.

Philoxenus on the contrary, was in fact a fighter and champion of "*mia-physis*" Christology. He represents a step towards the meeting with Hellenistic culture. Although he wrote in Syriac, his theology is more detached from the Syriac tradition. His Christology is basically Cyrilian. The Alexandrian Christology, shaped by Cyril, is further developed by Philoxenus. The theological fight between Philoxenus and Habib is well known. Both of them studied at the school of Edessa, but they turned to two directions. Both Jacob of Sarug and Philoxenus are very extensively treated, analysing their writings (pp.430-620). Habib is discussed in connection with the controversy with Philoxenus.

During this period there was the Tritheist controversy among the adherents of non-Chalcedonism. There were also several groups and controversies in the non-Chalcedonian camp, such as aphtarto-doctetism of Julian of

Halicarnassus, Agnoetes, controversy among the non-Chalcedonian Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria, and controversy about Probus and John Barbur among the monks. There were attempts to patch up the enmity in the anti-Chalcedonian camp. The leadership of Jacob Burdana managed to reconcile the various factions to some extent. The attempts to reunite the quarrelling factions of Christendom failed due to the fanatic monks, who had very influence among the ordinary people in the Syrian villages.

It was a period of conflicts among the followers of Christ in the name of terminology. Each quarrelling faction considered its formulation to be orthodox and the formulation of the other group as heretical. The net result was the loss of faith. The antagonism to the Byzantine Emperors added fuel to the antagonism to Chalcedon. The leaders of the anti-Chalcedonian faction tried to alienate the mass to an anti-imperial camp and the result was the subjection to Islam from South.

This book gives an extensive study of this period and Prof. Hainthaler deserves our respect in collaborating great authorities as contributors to this book. To all the students of Patristic theology it is a must. It has the same theological value as the other parts of volume 2. We now wait for the next part namely volume 2/5, which deals with Persia and the Caucasus.

Dr. Geevarghese Chediath

News

NEW TEXT FOR THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH

New text for the consecration of the church in the Syro Malabar Rite came into effect on 03 July 2014. The new text includes the consecration of the church and of the *Deppa* and the Re-dedication of the church.

NEW BISHOPS IN THE SYRO MALABAR CHURCH

The Holy Father appointed Rev. Dr. Ephrem Nariculam as the bishop of the Eparchy of Chanda and Mar Joy Alappattu as the Auxiliary Bishop of the St. Thomas Syro Malabar Eparchy of Chicago. Bishop Mar George Njaralakkatt is transferred to the Archeparchy of Thalassery by the Synod of the Syro Malabar Church. Mar Narickulam and Mar Njaralakkatt succeed Mar Vijay Anand Nedumpuram and Mar George Valiyamattam, who were retired from the active ministry.

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON FAMILY WAS CONDUCTED

A National Symposium on "Contemporary Challenges to the Pastoral Care of Marriage and Family in the Indian Context" was conducted on August 21-22, 2014 under the auspices of the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies (*Paurastya Vidyapitham*), Vadavathoor, Kottayam. His Excellency Philippose Mar Stephanos, the Auxiliary Bishop of Thiruvalla

and member of KCBC Family commission, inaugurated the Symposium. Around 400 persons from all over India participated in the symposium.

NEW DOCUMENT ON *SENSUS FIDEI* PUBLISHED

International Theological commission (ITC) published a document entitled *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*. The document is divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents the Biblical sources and retraces the history of the notion of *sensus fidei*. The following two chapters treat its nature and manifestations. The fourth chapter deals with the discernment of the true *sensus fidei*.

UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM ON ECUMENISM

An international theological symposium on Ecumenism is scheduled for November 26-27, 2014 in St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam as a joint venture of the Seminary and the Faculty of the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies (*Paurastya Vidyapitham*). This is conducted in the context of the 50th year of the publication of *Lumen Gentium*, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* of Vatican II to promote the ecumenical initiatives of the Churches. Members from various Churches will participate in this theological symposium.

OIRSI PUBLICATIONS

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Recent Books

370. **Xavier Koodapuzha**, *Vatican councilum Paurasthya- sabhakalum*, Kottayam, 2012, pp. 148.
371. **Lonappan Arangassey**, *Subsidiary Mysteries in the East* (in print)
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373. **Scaria Kanniyakonil**, *KaumaraIaingikavidyabhyasam Krishsvavazhiyiloode*, Kottayam, 2013, pp. 84.
374. **James Puliyumpil**, *Nikhya Muthal Vatianvare*, Kottayam, 2013, pp. 304.
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